# SUBMARINE U93

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*Cover art*

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*THE "MONDAVIA" SWUNG IN UPON HER VICTIM--THE IRON BOWS SMASHED INTO THE U93. See page 249.*

# SUBMARINE U93

A Tale of the Great War, of German Spies, and Submarines, of Naval Warfare, and all manner of Adventures.

BY

## CAPTAIN CHARLES GILSON

*Author of 'A Motor Scout in Flanders,' 'The Lost Empire,' 'The Sword of Freedom,' 'The Pirate Aeroplane,' 'The Spy,' 'The Race Round the World,' 'The Sword of Deliverance,' 'The Fire-Gods', 'The Lost Island,' 'The Lost Column,' etc.*

[image]

*THE VERY FIRST PROJECTILE BURST DIRECTLY OVER THE BRIDGE*

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER I--The Admiral's Sixpence

CHAPTER II--In Defiance of Authority

CHAPTER III--The World Plot

CHAPTER IV--Shadowed

CHAPTER V--Dropping the Pilot

CHAPTER VI--Captain Crouch

CHAPTER VII--In the Hold

CHAPTER VIII--A False Witness

CHAPTER IX--The "Dresden"

CHAPTER X--The Mysterious Message

CHAPTER XI--The Middle Watch

CHAPTER XII--The U93

CHAPTER XIII--To the Boats!

CHAPTER XIV--The Doomed Ship

CHAPTER XV--The Penitence of Captain Crouch

CHAPTER XVI--At the "Goat and Compasses"

CHAPTER XVII--Number 758

CHAPTER XVIII--"Mr. Russell"

CHAPTER XIX--A Clue

CHAPTER XX--Commander Fells

CHAPTER XXI--On Board a White Star Liner

CHAPTER XXII--By the Dogger Bank

CHAPTER XXIII--The Loss of the "Kitty McQuaire"

CHAPTER XXIV--The Tables Turned

CHAPTER XXV--Væ Victis

CHAPTER XXVI--The Titans

CHAPTER XXVII--The Battle of the Dogger Bank

CHAPTER XXVIII--The Wounded "Lion"

CHAPTER XXIX--Conclusion

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## ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

By GEORGE SOPER

THE "MONDAVIA" SWUNG IN UPON HER VICTIM. . . . . *Frontispiece*

THE VERY FIRST PROJECTILE BURST DIRECTLY OVER THE BRIDGE *Title-page*

THE BOY SPRANG ASIDE TOO LATE. HE WAS SEIZED ROUGHLY BY THE THROAT

THE "HARLECH" HAD TAKEN A MARKED LIST TO PORT--NO ONE COULD LIVE UPON THE DECK

LIKE AN EVIL EYE IN THE NIGHT THERE APPEARED AN ANSWERING LIGHT

"YOU'RE HEADING THE WRONG WAY, MAN! PUT ABOUT AND STAND CLEAR WHILE THE TROUBLE'S ON"

CROUCH SEIZED RUSSELL BY HIS LONG, FLOWING BEARD, WHICH HE TORE BODILY FROM THE OLD MAN'S WRINKLED FACE

AS THEY SANK OUT OF THE RED GLARE OF A WINTER'S SUNSET THERE APPEARED THE THREATENING FORM OF THE U93

SUBMARINE U93

*In the following story fact is blended with fiction. The account of the Battle of the North Sea, in which the "Blücher" was sunk, is as historically accurate as is possible with the details at present available. On the other hand, it would be well for the reader to know that the description of the pursuit of the "Dresden" in mid-Atlantic is wholly fictitious. The incident is introduced "for my story's sake," as Robert Louis Stevenson used to say, and also because it is illustrative of the character of the "Sea Affair" in the earlier days of the war.*

CHARLES GILSON.

# CHAPTER I--The Admiral's Sixpence

The following incident is well known to those who are acquainted with Naval history, and is mentioned here for the sole benefit of those who are not.

At the time of the Crimean war, and the bombardment of Sebastopol, an officer of the name of Burke commanded H.M.S. "Swiftsure," a ship which at one time approached to within point-blank range of the Russian shore batteries, which it silenced with a series of terrific broadsides. This feat, however, was not accomplished without considerable loss. Several men were struck down on the battery decks in the very act of serving the guns; and the life of the captain--who bellowed his orders from the bridge in a voice that was audible throughout the length and breadth of the ship, despite the roar and thunder of the cannon and the groans of wounded men--was saved as by a miracle.

A round of grape-shot raked the ship from fore to aft as she swung into position; and one of the little leaden pellets struck Burke immediately above the heart. Now, it so happened that he carried, suspended around his neck by a little silver chain, a "lucky" sixpence which he had got from his grandfather, Michael Burke, of the Inner Temple, and which bore the head of His Majesty, King George III.

At the time, Captain Burke was hardly conscious of a wound, which--according to the Fleet Surgeon--came under the official heading of a "severe contusion" not serious in nature. He remained upon the bridge in command of his ship, which he brought safely out of action, to the great credit of himself and the eternal glory of the British Navy.

But his lucky sixpence, which he found that night before he flung himself down upon his bunk, was ever after something of a curiosity--a thing to be talked about and passed from hand to hand in a London club. It was dented so deeply that it was shaped almost like a spoon, and as for the features of His Majesty, the third George, they were so obliterated that he might have been Queen Elizabeth or, for the matter of that, Julius Cæsar or the Cham of Tartary. In short, in plain words, it was a narrow squeak; and ever afterwards, both in the Navy and out of it, this officer, who rose to the rank of admiral and lived to the ripe old age of eighty-six, was known as "Swiftsure Burke." That he and his kind have lived and moved amongst us since the days of Drake and Hawkins is, after all, the best security we have against the invasion of these island shores.

There is a certain irony in the way things happen. No man can say for sure what destiny awaits those whom he loves and cherishes after he himself is gone. There was once--as a fact that can be proved--a man who sang for pennies in the street, whose ancestor, with the rank of colonel in the Army, headed his regiment as it charged at Blenheim. In the year 1914--which is not so long ago--Jimmy Burke, grandson of this same captain of the "Swiftsure," by a series of unmerited misfortunes, found himself, at the age of seventeen, an orphan and alone, in one of the greatest cities in the world. How that came about can be told in a few words. It was certainly through no fault of his own.

"Swiftsure Burke" had a son, whose name was John, who had neither his father's luck nor iron constitution. John Burke married a fair girl who had been thought the fairest in Dublin--that is to say, in the world. They had one son, a boy--the Jimmy Burke with whom these pages are concerned.

For three short years John Burke was happy--more happy, perhaps, than a man has a right to be. And then his wife died quite suddenly, and his frail health broke like a reed.

He was overcome by grief, and for a time his friends even feared for his state of mind. At last, acting on a famous doctor's advice, he realized all the property he possessed, packed up his worldly goods, and accompanied by his little five-year son, betook himself to the great United States, which was about the last place in the world where he had any right to be.

New York City, with all its flare and rush and hurry, was no place for this poor, broken English gentleman. Unsettled and unnerved, he took to speculation, and fell into the hands of a certain firm of financial brokers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to wit, famous even in New York for their sharp practices and hardness of heart. They had no more mercy on John Burke than on any other of their clients, and when the poor fellow was well-nigh destitute, he fell into a rapid consumption. Then, knowing that his days were numbered, he called his son to his bedside, and gave Jimmy a dying father's advice.

In the first place, he asked the boy's pardon for the wrong that he had done him. He told Jimmy to try to live honourably and well, and never to forget three things: his duty to God, the example of the mother whom the boy could only just remember, and the fact that he was an English gentleman--the grandson of "Swiftsure Burke."

And after that, John Burke died. The life flickered out of him like a candle in the wind, whilst Jimmy was left kneeling at the bedside, his young frame numbed by a great feeling of weakness that pervaded every limb, and his face all streamed with tears.

The doctor lifted the boy to his feet, and just then something fell from the bed to the floor, which the doctor picked up and gave to Jimmy. It was a little coin--all, indeed, that the boy possessed in the world, all Jimmy Burke's inheritance. It was the "lucky" sixpence of Admiral "Swiftsure Burke."

# CHAPTER II--In Defiance of Authority

At the time of his father's death, Jimmy Burke was seventeen years of age. He was a strong lad and tall for his age, fair of complexion, with a direct look in the eyes and a resolute cast of chin that he had got from "Swiftsure Burke."

He had had a hard life, even at that age; and a hard life will either mould a boy or break his heart--more often the latter, unless he be made of the right stuff. But Jimmy came of a fighting race. He soon learnt to hold his own, being in more ways than one far better fitted to succeed in the world than his less robust, unhappy father.

Left alone in a great city like New York, where there are as many rogues as street-cars, and more "toughs" than police, he looked about him for some suitable employment, resolved in spite of everything to earn an honest living. Knowing that good fortune comes only to those that seek it, he presented himself at the offices of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern--the very firm, though he never knew it, that had brought about the ruin of his father--and boldly asked to be taken on as a clerk.

Rosencrantz questioned the boy as to his capacities, sounding him in much the same way as a farmer might prod a fat sheep on a market day, and very soon arrived at the conclusion that Jimmy Burke was the very lad he wanted. He engaged him on the spot, as a kind of combined clerk and office boy, and--what suited Rosencrantz most of all--at a starvation salary, which at the time, however, seemed more than enough to Jimmy.

And thereupon the boy entered upon a phase of his existence in which there was little sunshine and much that would have made him miserable and downcast had he been made of weaker stuff.

Rosencrantz was a bald, clean-shaven man, with a hooked nose, a sallow face, and a domineering manner. It was his habit to browbeat his employees; but it was no more possible to crush the spirit, or blot out the personality of the

grandson of "Swiftsure Burke" than it would be to curb the cub of a tiger. The boy remained the same: straightforward, frank and honest. He continued to do his work to the best of his ability, taking his employer's hard words for what they were worth, accepting them as part and parcel of his life, a sort of grim necessity.

As for Guildenstern, he seldom appeared at the office; and when he did so, it was quite evident that he had little or no say in the business. He was a small man, very short-sighted, whose gold-rimmed pince-nez would never stay on his nose. He was always perfectly ready to agree to whatever Rosencrantz said, and if he ever made a suggestion of his own--which was seldom enough--he did so with many apologies, as if he was well aware that he had no right to open his mouth.

Both these men were "hyphenated-Americans" of German descent. Neither, however, had ever been to the Fatherland, nor was Rosencrantz able to speak a single word of what should have been his native language. He had been born in Chicago, and on that account it was his custom to refer to himself as a "freeborn citizen of the great United States."

Whatever else he was, he was first a rascal, and secondly a man of business. The sole object of his life was the making of money, in regard to which he was handicapped by no qualms of conscience. Such ambitions are bound to be debasing; and Herr Rosencrantz was quite incapable of any finer feelings. He took not the least personal interest in the orphan boy whom fate had thrown upon his hands. He experienced no feelings of remorse for having brought John Burke to the brink of ruin and the door of death. Jimmy was just a bright lad who could be put to a good use, who was certainly worth four times the salary he received.

In course of time, the boy so disliked and mistrusted his employer that he had serious thoughts of looking for work elsewhere. One thing, and one thing only, prevented him from doing so. His sole friend in these days was a girl, a little older than himself, whose name was Peggy Wade.

Peggy was an orphan, too. Her parents had died when she was quite a child, since when she had been brought up by an aunt who lived at Hoboken--a true woman, who could give, without thought of recompense, and without reluctance, that love and tender care to which the young should be entitled. She was a mother, in all but name, to Peggy Wade; and Peggy, in a girl's way, was a mother to Jimmy Burke.

She was employed by Rosencrantz as a shorthand-typist; and thus it was that she and Jimmy, constituting the whole office staff, were thrown much in each other's way, and before long they had become inseparable friends. Often, when they were obliged to work long after business hours, smuggling into the office various unwholesome edibles, such as pork-pies, sardines and cakes, they would make cocoa on the stove and revel in what they termed a "picnic."

They would spend their Saturdays together in Central Park, or else go even so far afield as Coney Island, provided one or the other had sufficient money to spend upon the roundabouts and swings. And in the evenings they would return to Hoboken, where Peggy's aunt, with the sweet smile of a loving woman, to whom the happiness of others is a great reward, would listen in patient satisfaction to the whole tale of their adventures. That was how things were during the winter and the early spring of the year 1914--which is a date that will stand forth in scarlet lettering in the History of the World.

It was during the month of April that Rosencrantz began to receive visits from a certain distinguished-looking gentleman, whom Peggy recognized at once by his portrait which had appeared more than once in the New York papers. He was a certain Baron von Essling, a military attaché of the German Embassy in Washington, though never by any chance did he think fit to give his name. He always asked for Rosencrantz, and was admitted without delay, when the two men would remain closeted together sometimes even for hours.

In more ways than one, there was an atmosphere of secrecy about these interviews, which even Jimmy could not fail to observe. In the first place, the Baron's visits invariably took place after dark, when most of the business houses were closed. Rosencrantz, too, never failed to lock his office door after the Baron had entered. He also became more fussy than ever, and more impatient and nervous. He had just discovered that Peggy and Jimmy were in the habit of entering his room after he had left it, for the purpose of converting his office stove into a kitchen range.

This he strictly forbade. He admitted that it was necessary for both of them to have access into the inner office, but cooking he would certainly not permit. There can be small doubt that in his own boyhood (if he had ever had one) the joys of a "picnic" had been quite unknown.

It was also about this time that he purchased a peculiar leather box--which he called his "attaché-case"--of which he himself possessed the only key, and in which he kept certain documents which no one but himself, and apparently the Baron von Essling, was ever permitted to see.

Now, one of the man's peculiarities was that he liked to see his office tidy, whereas he himself was one of the most slovenly people in the world. And as Jimmy was not particularly methodical in such matters, the result was that Peggy was the only one of the three who ever knew where anything was. It was this, as it turned out, that brought about something in the nature of a great calamity, as we shall see.

Von Essling, when he called, was sometimes accompanied by a short, thickset fellow, who went by the name of Rudolf Stork. Stork was a strange-looking man, with an exceedingly wrinkled face, and a sinister cast of countenance. Peggy,

with the unfailing instinct of her sex, mistrusted him from the start.

Stork was evidently a sailor, for he wore a pea-jacket, walked with a rolling gait, and was eternally chewing tobacco, and expectorating with a considerable degree of skill. If Rosencrantz was a scoundrel, Rudolf Stork was something worse. There was that about him that suggested the jail-bird, the man who knows what it means to wear a convict's clothes, to be labelled with a number and pace a prison yard. One evening, Rosencrantz left the office earlier than usual. There had been a sudden bout of cold weather, when it had seemed that the spring was at hand. A bitter wind was blowing through the New York streets, that picked up the dust and drove it in eddies between the great, square-cut, towering buildings. It was wholly characteristic of Rosencrantz that he grudged his clerks a fire, though the stove in his own room had been burning all that day. Peggy and Jimmy had been left at their desks with orders to make up certain arrears of work. The boy sat before an opened ledger; the girl was busy at her typewriter with a sheaf of shorthand notes at her elbow.

Suddenly, she got to her feet, unrolled the last quarto, and placed the cover over the machine.

"I've done," she said, looking across at Jimmy.

The boy, who was still poring over the ledger, ran his fingers through his hair.

"I wish I had," he answered, in a tired voice. "If I can't balance these accounts, I shall hear all about it to-morrow. Say, Peggy," he continued, swinging round in his chair, "what do you say to a picnic?"

Peggy straightened, and shaped her lips as if about to whistle.

"Just fine!" she exclaimed. "But, Jimmy, dare we risk it?"

The boy's face altered; for a moment he looked quite serious.

"No," said he. "It's not good enough. I don't mind for myself, but I'm not going to get you into a row."

Peggy laughed.

"Oh, I don't care," she answered.

"It's not allowed," said Jimmy.

"It wouldn't be half such fun if it was," observed Peggy, with a world of truth. "Besides, he won't come back again to-night. He told me I was to leave the most important letters till to-morrow morning."

Jimmy was on his feet in an instant; the ledger was slammed down upon a shelf.

"Come on," he cried. "We'll have the feast of our lives."

Their cooking utensils consisted of a cheap kettle, a frying-pan, and a few knives, forks and spoons. These Peggy had hidden in a large cupboard in Rosencrantz's room, which was used as a receptacle for old account books and ledgers

and all kinds of rubbish, and where their employer never by any chance happened to look. As they rescued these priceless possessions from behind a collection of office brooms and dust-pans, Jimmy noticed that the mysterious leather box--which Rosencrantz called his "attaché-case"--had been placed on the floor of the cupboard.

The recognized preliminary to an office "picnic" was that they should club their money. On this occasion Peggy produced two dollars fifty, whereas Jimmy could contribute no more than seventy cents. When Peggy had filled the kettle, it was arranged that Jimmy should remain in charge, whilst the girl went out to purchase supplies which, it was decided, should include sausages, in regard to the cooking of which Peggy was an acknowledged expert.

Now, an escapade of this sort loses much of its zest when the bold adventurer finds himself alone; and no sooner had Peggy set out upon her errand than Jimmy became conscious of feeling a trifle nervous. Though he was never willing to admit it to himself, he held Rosencrantz in considerable dread; and he did not like to think what the result would be should he and Peggy be caught. In consequence, for the first time in his life, he was really alarmed when suddenly he heard the clashing sound of the brass doors of the elevator, followed by footsteps in the corridor.

Shuffling the knives and forks into his coat pocket, with the kettle in one hand and the frying-pan in the other, he sprang to his feet and stood for a moment irresolute, not knowing what to do. He could not go back to the clerks' office, since there he would meet Rosencrantz, whose voice was audible through the half-opened sliding door in the wall.

It did not take Jimmy long to come to the conclusion that, on such an occasion as this, discretion is the better part of valour. Without a moment's thought, he dashed into the cupboard; tripped over the leather box, so that some of the half-boiling water was spilled from the spout of the kettle, and then closed the door.

He did so only in the nick of time; for, a second later, Rosencrantz himself entered the room, followed by the Baron von Essling and Rudolf Stork.

# CHAPTER III--The World Plot

The office door was closed and Jimmy heard the key turn in the lock. Rosencrantz offered his guests chairs, and then apparently seated himself at his writing-desk. Of the conversation that ensued Jimmy could hear every word, for the cupboard door was thin and von Essling, who did most of the talking, had a deep, resounding voice.

The plot that was unfolded, word by word, was amazing and colossal. It was so cold-blooded and terrible, and was intended to be so far-reaching in its results, that the boy could hardly bring himself to believe the evidence of his ears. Time and again, he had to pinch himself, to make sure that the whole thing was not a nightmare from which he would presently awaken.

It must be remembered that at that time the tragedy of Serajevo had not taken place. Europe and, indeed, the whole world--was at peace. Official Germany was even then talking of friendly relations with England.

And yet, it appeared, from what the Baron had to say, that Germany intended to plunge the whole of Europe into war. By the first of August, the German legions would be on the march, crossing the frontiers of France on the very day that they swept down upon Paris in 1870--forty-four years ago.

France was to be crushed, and would be crushed--according to von Essling--after six weeks of war. Russia would take time to concentrate her forces; and after Paris had fallen, the German armies could be transferred to the east, where the fall of Warsaw would checkmate the Russian armies till the conclusion of the campaign. When peace had been declared, and the German Empire extended to the North Sea and the great port of Antwerp, a fitting moment was to be seized to throttle England and break up the British Empire, once and for all.

This--as the Baron explained--was the main policy of all true Pan-Germans. Not until Great Britain had crumbled to the dust, could Germany realize to the full her dreams of World-Power and World-Dominion. England stood between Germany and the sun.

"I tell you, my friends," von Essling almost shouted; "I tell you, the blow

will fall with alarming suddenness. The declaration of war will come like a thunderbolt. We are ready; France and Russia are unprepared; it is impossible that England will dare to interfere."

"That is good," cried Rudolf Stork. "I have no love for the English, who encumber the face of the earth like a plague of flies. None the less, I fail to see why a plain sea-faring man like myself should be taken into your confidence."

"It so happens," said Rosencrantz, "that you are the very man we want. In the first place, though you call yourself a Dutchman, you are German born, as I know very well, and can be trusted. Also, you know the world; you can speak four languages--German, French, English and Dutch. Moreover, you were once an actor; you should know how to disguise yourself, to play several minor parts in this great drama which is about to astonish the world."

Stork gave a grunt of disapproval.

"It seems to me," he said, "you know too much about me."

"I know more than that," said the other. "I know that you are an ex-convict, and even now are wanted by the police. However, you have nothing to fear; I intend to keep my knowledge to myself. The Baron himself will explain exactly what you will be required to do."

Once again, von Essling took up the thread of this ruthless world-wide plot. In order to hasten the decomposition of what he called the already-tottering British Empire, rebellion must be stirred up in the British colonies. The seeds of sedition must be sown broadcast, in India, in South Africa and Egypt.

Here, it appeared, both Rosencrantz and Rudolf Stork could be of the greatest assistance. According to von Essling there was little or no risk, and they might count upon being well paid. "The German Emperor," said the Baron, "does not fail to reward those who serve the Fatherland."

The offices of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were to be used as a kind of Secret Service Bureau. Whether or not England joined in the conflict, the United States would, in any case, remain neutral. From New York, intelligence could be transmitted direct to Berlin, and *vice versa*. Von Essling's agents--one of whom was to be Rudolf Stork--acting as spies in the war area, would transmit, or bring personally, the information they gathered to Rosencrantz, who would represent the Baron, who would sift all intelligence, and supervise cyphered telegrams to the Intelligence Department in the Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin. For the present absolute secrecy was to be maintained.

Von Essling ended. There was a brief pause, during which Stork spat upon the floor.

"And may I ask," said he at length, "what guarantee I am to have? I don't, mind you, say that all this is not true; but, still, business is business, and no man takes on board a cargo without a manifest, which is a kind of passport on the sea."

"You are quite right," said the Baron. "I can supply you with credentials which will instantly dispel such doubts. I have already entrusted to Mr. Rosencrantz papers of the utmost value, which will prove to you that we are perfectly sincere, that it will be worth your while to help us."

It was then that Rosencrantz got to his feet, and shuffled about the room.

"It so happens," he observed, "that the papers you mention are in a certain leather box which was given into the charge of my secretary."

Von Essling gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"You take grave risks!" said he.

"My dear Baron," replied the other, "the girl can be trusted implicitly. And besides, she is totally ignorant of what the box contains."

Von Essling had something else to say, but Stork took him up.

"What happens if I'm caught?" he asked.

"If you succeed," said the Baron, "you will be amply rewarded. You will be paid according to the value of the information you obtain. But if you fail the misfortune is yours. We wash our hands of you; we know nothing whatsoever about you. That is the principle upon which the Secret Service works."

"I see," said the man. "Whatever I do is at my own risk."

"Precisely," said the Baron.

There was another pause; and then Stork got to his feet.

"I'll do it," said he. "I've every confidence in myself. If you want my candid opinion, I think I'm the very man for the job."

"Good!" said von Essling. "Self-assurance is essential. And now, there are a few questions I would like you to answer. Have you ever been to London? Could you find your own way about in that labyrinth of a city? It will probably be necessary for you to go there."

"I know London well," said Stork, "from Whitechapel to Hammersmith. At one time, I played Iago in Shakespeare's play, in a little theatre which is now pulled down, in the Portobello Road."

"Ah," said the other, "some time in the near future you and I may meet in London. I have never been there. Though I can both speak and write English with ease, I have never set foot in England."

"You are likely to leave New York?" asked Rosencrantz.

"Perhaps; I can say nothing for certain. My post here is merely a blind. I was transferred into the Diplomatic Service from the Secret Service for reasons of convenience. As a military attaché, I have many opportunities for gleaning information."

Jimmy Burke was only a boy, whose experience of the world was necessarily somewhat limited. None the less, he was well able to understand the depth of the perfidy with which he found himself confronted. The whole thing seemed too

villainous to be true. He could not believe that the modern civilized world was such a hotbed of treason and deceit--a kind of magnified thieves' kitchen wherein mighty nations played the part of common footpads.

Indignation and excitement left him breathless. In fact, he was so astounded and dismayed that he had forgotten his own danger, when suddenly he was brought back to his senses by the loud slamming of a door. On the instant, as he recognized the truth, it was as if a blow had been struck him: Peggy had returned!

He was told afterwards what actually happened. At the time, shut up in the darkness of the cupboard, fearing to move an inch, almost dreading to breathe, he was able to see nothing of what took place in the room.

Peggy, with cheeks flushed in the wind, and an armful of small paper parcels, came swinging along the corridor, tried to open the office door, and found it locked.

Before she had time to guess what was about to happen, the door was flung wide open, and she found herself confronted by Rosencrantz and his companions.

She stood stock-still, speechless and afraid. Her first inclination was to fly; and the next moment, she found herself wondering what had become of Jimmy.

Rosencrantz, after the manner of a cat who plays with a mouse, with extreme politeness ushered her into the room.

"And may I ask," said he, in a soft, oily voice, "may I ask what those parcels contain?"

Peggy allowed him to take them from her hand. He opened them one by one. The first contained a packet of cocoa; the next (of all iniquities!) a bundle of sausages. There was also bread, butter, sugar and lard.

"I see," said Rosencrantz, "I see. It is not sufficient for me to give orders; it is not sufficient for me to forbid you to turn my office into a kitchen and a common eating-house; but you must leave your work the very moment my back is turned."

"Is this the girl," asked von Essling, "who enjoys a position of trust?"

"I have been mistaken in her," said Rosencrantz. "There can be no doubt as to that. Where is my attaché-case?" he demanded. "Where have you put the leather box?"

At these words, it seemed to Jimmy that his heart ceased to beat. In the ordinary course of events, he would have stepped forth boldly, to share with Peggy the consequence of their joint guilt. As it was, with this colossal secret on his mind, and knowing full well that his right foot was resting on the very leather box in question, he was petrified by fear.

At times of extreme nervous tension, the senses are frequently acute. Though Peggy's frightened voice came in little above a whisper, Jimmy was able to hear her words with terrible distinctness.

"It is here, in the cupboard," she said. "I will get it--now."

# CHAPTER IV--Shadowed

Peggy Wade was an American--which is the same thing as saying that she was possessed of considerable presence of mind. In the climax that now took place, she might easily have lost her head, instead of which she did all that was within her power to avert calamity.

She approached the cupboard door and opened it. Fortunately, the hinges were towards the centre of the room, where the three men stood together. Rosencrantz and his companions could neither see into the cupboard nor observe the look of intense alarm that came into the girl's face, the moment she found herself confronted by Jimmy Burke.

She mastered herself in an instant. As quick as thought, Jimmy thrust the leather box into her hand; at which she turned quickly, and closed the door. For the time being, at least, the situation was saved.

"You have not yet told me," said Rosencrantz, in the assured tones of an inveterate bully, "why you dared to disobey my orders?"

Peggy's thoughts were still with Jimmy. Though she knew nothing of the colossal plot which had just come to light, she trembled to think of what the consequences would be, should the boy be discovered. She answered timidly, in a voice so low as to be hardly audible.

"I have no excuse," she said.

Rosencrantz gave vent to a grunt.

"I should think not," said he, with a quick shrug of the shoulders. "And where's that rascal of a boy?"

Peggy could not answer. For a moment, she thought it was best to tell a deliberate lie, and have done with it; and then, she found she could not. She just stood quite still and silent, unable to lift her eyes from the floor--a very figure of guilt.

Rudolf Stork was a man upon whom little or nothing was lost. He had the eyes of a lynx. He was one whose very liberty, perhaps, depended upon his powers of observation, his memory and his wits. Without a word, he turned upon

his heel, in three strides crossed the room, and flung wide open the cupboard door.

And there stood Jimmy Burke, his head half lowered, his face white as a sheet. He took two slow steps forward towards the centre of the room where the three men stood regarding him in amazement, and then stopped dead, apparently afraid to look about him.

Rosencrantz drew in a deep breath, as a man does who is about to take a plunge into ice-cold water. Von Essling let out an oath in his own language, as he drummed with his fingers upon the silver knob of a stout malacca cane. As for Stork, his hand went quickly to his hip-pocket, and a small nickel-plated revolver glittered in the light.

"Eavesdropping!" cried Rosencrantz. "An eavesdropper--by all that's wonderful!"

"Do you realize what this means?" exclaimed the Baron, gesticulating wildly with a hand. "There's danger here! This boy must have overheard every word we said. The result may be disastrous."

Stork crouched like a tiger. The expression upon the man's face was terrible. Slowly, he raised his revolver at arm's length, directing the muzzle straight at Jimmy's heart.

"There's only one way," said he. "It's not pleasant, but I'll do it."

Beyond doubt, he would have fired, had not the Baron seized his wrist.

"Do nothing foolish!" he exclaimed. "You forget the girl. There's a witness--in the girl!"

Stork lowered his revolver, turned slowly, and stared hard at Peggy, who quailed before the ferocity of those pale, cat-like eyes.

Rosencrantz, who was a coward at heart, had no desire to see murder done on his own premises; he had never bargained for that. Since matters had already gone too far, and seeing some explanation was necessary, he did his best to laugh it off.

"Enough, my friend!" he cried. "That is enough. You desired to frighten him, and have done so. See, the boy is trembling. It will teach him a lesson to the very end of his life."

This was not true; but, still, it was good enough to pass, to act as a shield for Rudolf Stork. Von Essling had not yet recovered his presence of mind; indeed, he was still so put out he could not stand still, but, tucking his malacca cane under his arm, set to pacing backwards and forwards in the room.

"This is serious," he muttered; "terribly serious." Then he pulled up suddenly in front of Jimmy, whom he regarded steadfastly, looking the boy up and down, from head to foot.

"It may be all right," said he at last, with something that was not far from a sigh of relief. "Fortunately the boy is young. And yet," he added, "I cannot think

why he hid himself. It is all a mystery."

"I think," said Rosencrantz, "I can explain. He was there by chance. He did not know that I intended to return to the office, and having deliberately disobeyed my orders, he had a natural desire to avoid me."

The Baron von Essling shrugged his shoulders. Rosencrantz turned sharply upon Jimmy and the girl, who now stood side by side.

"You will both leave this place at once," said he, "and you will not return. Understand, I never wish to see your faces again."

At that, he went to the door and threw it open, making a motion of the hand for them to go.

They were about to leave, when Stork seized Jimmy roughly by a shoulder. He was a strong man, as the boy could tell from the iron grip that held him as if he were in a vice.

"Wait a bit," said he. "Easy now. We'd be blind fools to let you go like that. Listen here, my boy, and let what I've got to say sink into your memory. Breathe so much as a single word to any living soul of what you've heard to-night, and I'll find it out. You may set your mind at rest on that. I'm not a mild man, nor a plaster saint; some folk might say that sometimes I'm a little quick of temper. At any rate, I tell you this: I'll stick at nothing, if you neglect the advice I give you gratis. So, just beware, take warning; mum's the word."

And at that, he sent Jimmy flying headlong through the doorway.

As the boy recovered his balance--and indeed, he only just saved himself from stretching his length upon the floor--he found Peggy at his side, with a white face and trembling lips, and her hands clasped together.

"Oh, come," she cried, "we must go away from here. Jimmy, I never knew that I could be so frightened." Somehow she was breathless.

Very quickly, side by side, they ran down flight after flight of steps, until, at last, they found themselves upon the sidewalk of the famous street that traverses New York from end to end. A little after, they stood together at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Broadway.

It was night, and the great city was alive. The people were thronging to the theatres; the street-cars were crowded, their bells clanging incessantly; newsboys raced across the street. Broadway was a blaze of light; thousands of advertisements, brilliantly illumined with all the colours of the rainbow, caught the eye in all directions. Peggy drew near to Jimmy, and took his arm and pressed it.

"Whatever happened, Jimmy?" she asked. "I'm kind of dazed. I don't really understand."

"I don't know that I do," said the boy. "Even now, I can't believe that it wasn't all a dream."

For a little time, they walked along in silence. It was Peggy who spoke again.

"You had better come back with me," she said. "I must tell Aunt Marion I've been dismissed. Somehow I don't think we ought to leave each other now."

There was another pause; and then Peggy gave a shudder.

"That man was terrible," she said. "I can see him now. Do you know, Jimmy, he meant to kill you."

The boy laughed. Now that he was quit of the atmosphere of that room wherein had been disclosed the terrible, almost overpowering plot that was to shake to its very foundations the whole civilized world, it was easy enough to laugh. For all that, his boyish confidence in himself had not yet wholly returned. Quite apart from the fact that his life had been threatened, he had received a shock from which he was not likely to recover for some time to come.

It was quite late when they arrived at Peggy's home in Hoboken, where they found Peggy's aunt, Miss Daintree, laying the table for supper.

In a few brief words, Peggy told her aunt as much as she knew of what had happened; whereat Aunt Marion expressed neither surprise nor disappointment. She listened with a sweet smile, and rewarded Peggy with a kiss, saying that she was more glad than sorry, since the firm of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern had never been to her liking. Besides, as she pointed out, Peggy was worth a great deal more than they paid her. There were thousands of chances for a good stenographer in New York, so after all Peggy had no cause to despair.

Jimmy stayed to supper; but, despite the fact that both he and Peggy had been deprived of the illicit joys of a "picnic," he had neither any appetite nor any wish to talk, but remained pensive and grave as a judge.

Afterwards, seated before the fire with those two women, one on either side, he told the whole truth, in defiance of Rudolf Stork. And that was surely a strange audience to listen to a story of such world-wide dimensions, fraught with such unheard-of possibilities. The one was a woman who had already reached middle age, whose hair was touched with grey, whose life had been spent for the most part in those simple, sunlit joys which are God's gift to the really good. And the other was a girl who might still have been at school.

They listened in still amazement, finding it all not easy to believe. And when Jimmy had come to the end of his narrative, and his face was flushed and his eyes bright, he looked to Aunt Marion, as the eldest--and presumedly the wisest--for some practical advice. But that kind-hearted, loving lady knew, perhaps, even less of the world than he.

She thought at first that it would be best to go at once to the police; but, when Jimmy suggested that the New York police were notoriously corrupt, she agreed that, perhaps, the British consul was a more suitable person. Accordingly, after a long discussion, it was arranged that Jimmy and Peggy should go together to that gentleman's office the following day.

That night, the boy slept on a sofa; but Aunt Marion had made him promise that he would remain with them, as their guest, until he had obtained some new employment. There was a box-room which she could easily convert into a bedroom. She knew Jimmy well, and loved the boy; she even knew the story of "Swiftsure Burke." She knew that Jimmy was quite penniless, and would have to make his own way in the world; and she was anxious to do all she could to help him.

Jimmy spent the following morning bringing the few worldly goods he possessed from his old lodgings in New York itself to the other side of the harbour. He had enough money at home to pay the week's rent he owed, and the cab fare and the ferry-boat. And when he had done that, he found himself with nothing in the world--but "Swiftsure Burke's" lucky, dented sixpence.

At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the boy and girl sallied forth together, to interview the British consul. They had an exceedingly vague notion of what they were going to say to that all-important personage when they met him; they had not even a very exact idea as to what the duties of a consul were. None the less, they were quite convinced that he would explain the whole affair.

As it turned out, the consul was on a holiday--as his Britannic Majesty's consuls frequently are. However, they were shown into the presence of a certain Mr. Ridgeway, who introduced himself as the consul's private secretary.

This Mr. Ridgeway listened to the boy's story with an expression of mingled astonishment and disgust. At one moment, he was really alarmed; at the next, he was perfectly convinced that the whole thing was a hoax. But, towards the end, when Jimmy became very excited, and Peggy wrung her hands, he could scarcely fail to see that the boy was terribly in earnest. Moreover, he knew the Baron von Essling by reputation--which reputation was certainly not of the best. Still, he could hardly bring himself to believe either that such a cold-blooded, deliberate plot really did exist, or that a military attaché could so abuse a position of the greatest trust.

He promised, however, to tell the whole story to the consul when he returned, and pointed out that in due course, no doubt, the Foreign Office would be informed. In the meantime, Jimmy was to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut. On no account whatsoever was he to say a word to any one of what he knew.

The boy was determined to remember this advice, which--strangely enough--coincided with that of Rudolf Stork. As he came down the front doorsteps of the consulate, though he was out of work and practically a pauper, though he was conscious of the fact that he was living on the charity of others who could not afford to support him and upon whom he had no claim, he walked with a lighter tread than ever in his life before. He could not but feel proud of the fact that, for some mysterious reason, he was, indeed, a person of importance.

A man was leaning against the railings, both hands thrust deep in his

trousers pockets, a battered hat jammed over his eyes--one of the inevitable loafers who are to be found in the streets of every city in the world. As Jimmy reached the bottom step, this man looked at him sharply from over his shoulder, and then slouched away.

The boy stood stock still, staring after the man with the battered hat, with parted lips and widely opened eyes. He did not speak or move, until Peggy suddenly touched his arm.

"Did you see that man?" he whispered.

"What is it?" Peggy exclaimed. "What's the matter, Jimmy?"

Jimmy pointed to the receding figure which just then disappeared quite suddenly round a corner.

"That man," said he, "was Rudolf Stork. And he knows I saw him."

# CHAPTER V--Dropping the Pilot

If we put away ghosts and such like--in which nobody nowadays believes--there is, perhaps, no more unpleasant experience in the world than to be shadowed. The fact that one's footsteps are dogged eternally, that at every sudden corner or darkened by-way a hidden foe may lurk, is the kind of thing that is well calculated to test the strongest nerves.

Stork, in his own words, was a man who would stick at nothing--a desperate blade who, no doubt, had already more than one crime upon his conscience. Peggy was terrified; and though Jimmy did his best to show a bold front, his heart was filled with misgivings.

Determined to get back to Hoboken as soon as possible, they quickened their footsteps, crossing the great avenues that traverse the entire length of this most wonderful of modern cities.

As all Yankees know, the offices of an exceedingly influential newspaper are situated in Fifth Avenue, which is the main thoroughfare of New York; and as the boy and girl passed the entrance to this enormous block of buildings, they were almost swept from the pavement by a crowd of news-boys who came rushing

round a corner, shouting themselves hoarse, like a party of dancing Dervishes or Bashi-bazouks. In point of fact, they made so much noise among themselves that it was quite impossible to understand a single word they said, though it was manifest that some news had just come to hand of startling importance.

At that moment, a poster was pasted up in one of the windows on the ground floor, which contained the following announcement--

TERRIBLE TRAGEDY IN EUROPE
AUSTRIAN ARCHDUKE AND DUCHESS
MURDERED BY SERVIANS

Peggy and Jimmy stopped to read the notice, which--it must be confessed--conveyed little or nothing to either of them. They could not in any way associate the murder of the heir to the throne of Austria with the colossal plot that von Essling had disclosed in the presence of Rosencrantz and Rudolf Stork. They did not realize that this was the spark that was destined to spread, within the space of a few short weeks, into an almost universal conflagration; that the curtain had been rung up upon the greatest drama the world had ever known.

It was during the next few weeks that it gradually became apparent to the ordinary man in the street that the situation was serious. Nearly all that time Jimmy was looking about him for some new employment. Peggy had been almost immediately successful. She had secured quite a well-paid position with a large firm of shipping agents: Jason, Stileman and May, a British company whose house-flag is to be found on every ocean in the world.

Jimmy, on the other hand, had no such luck; and indeed, he had not Peggy's qualifications. Week after week, he roamed the streets of New York, looking for work, and every night returned to Hoboken, crestfallen and disappointed. Though he had come to regard Peggy and Aunt Marion as his own relations, he was still the grandson of "Swiftsure Burke," and found his position in one sense insupportable. Though he was treated with the utmost kindness, he was never quite able to forget that he was living upon the charity of those who were pressed for money themselves. Finally, he resolved to work with his hands; and seeing a notice to the effect that stevedores and dock-labourers were wanted, he applied for work in the docks, and was engaged on the spot, at a rate of pay which--to his surprise--greatly exceeded that which he had received from Rosencrantz.

Neither was his work particularly hard or uncongenial. All he had to do was to manipulate a large hydraulic crane, by means of which cargo was hoisted into the ships. For a week or so, he was happier than he had ever been in his life. He continued to live with Peggy and Aunt Marion, whom he had persuaded to accept payment for his board and lodging. Indeed, he soon came to regard them

as mother and sister; Peggy and he were greater inseparables than ever. Also, he was man enough not to be ashamed of his canvas working suit and oily hands. He was earning an honest living; his work kept him out in the open air, and the ships which went forth every day to all the seven seas, that flew the ensigns of every country in the world, appealed to his imagination and carried his thoughts back to the land of his birth which he could only just remember.

And then, the War broke out; Europe burst suddenly into flame. For days the tension had been extreme. Austria, in spite of the protestations of every country in Europe, with the sole exception of the German Empire, was determined to carry out a kind of punitive expedition against Servia.

It was not only the sacred duty of the Czar to protect Slav interests, it was of vital importance to Russia that no Germanic power should gain control of the Dardanelles; and hence, as a purely precautionary measure Russia was forced to mobilize.

At that the German Empire gathered its armies together, which made it incumbent upon France to hold to her alliance, to be prepared to stand side by side with her great Eastern ally. Germany knew quite well what the result would be, when she urged Austria to take reprisals. It is unbelievable that Austria would have acted without the assurance of German support. Germany was resolved that a purely local question, relating to the independence of the Kingdom of Servia, which might easily have been settled in a friendly manner, should be made the excuse for a trial of her own gigantic strength, for an attempt to realize "World-Power."

She wanted this for three reasons: Firstly, she recognized that she could not maintain indefinitely the continued cost of her armaments and fleet without internal troubles sooner or later arising; secondly, she had supreme confidence in herself, she knew that she was prepared, and that no other nation was; and thirdly, it was only by conquest that she could gain the opportunities for national expansion she desired. If any further proof be needed that the guilt of the Great War lies upon the rulers of the German Empire, it is to be found in the fact that when--mainly through the efforts of His Majesty King George, the Czar of Russia and Sir Edward Grey--both Austria and Russia were ready to do their best to come to some agreement, Germany bluntly replied that the matter had gone too far, that the die was cast, and her troops--already on the march--could not be called back. The great machinery of War had been set in motion.

And as if this had not been in itself a sufficient outrage upon the claims of civilization, the German armies, without warning or excuse, swept down upon poor, unhappy Belgium, and the whole world stood aghast at atrocities which put to shame even the campaigns of Tamerlane and Jenghiz Khan. In such circumstances as these, if England had stood apart, the British Empire would have

crumbled to the dust. There would not have been a right-thinking, honest roan, worthy of the name of Briton, who would not have disowned his Motherland for very shame. In defence of Belgium, in defence of the sacred right of treaties, in defence of our own honour, our homes and the land we love, we took up the sword--which shall not be laid down until Belgium is avenged, and a great and growing menace to the peace and prosperity of Europe has been blotted out, once and for all.

These things were understood by the majority of people in America, as in every other neutral state in the world--with the possible exception of Sweden.

As for Jimmy Burke, working a good ten hours a day in the New York docks, he yearned to board one of the many steamers flying the red ensign of England, to sail to his native land. As the grandson of "Swiftsure Burke" he longed to fight for England--a longing that was almost irresistible during the first weeks of the War, when it seemed that nothing could save Paris from the fate of '70.

Aunt Marion and Peggy were no less anxious to help; there are noble parts for women to play in war. It so happened that at one time Miss Daintree had been a hospital nurse; and she was now resolved to return to her old profession. Peggy, too, began to attend evening classes at a hospital, and very soon displayed a natural aptitude for nursing--a combination of quickness, sympathy and presence of mind.

In all probability, Jimmy would have eventually worked his way to Canada, and joined the loyal and splendid forces of the Dominion, but for the incident narrated below, which altered the course of his life in a very unexpected and violent manner. There is no question as to the motive that led to the outrage: the boy was in possession of extremely valuable information; and besides, he had deliberately neglected Stork's advice.

One night, when a ship, timed to sail at daybreak, had not taken on all her cargo until past ten o'clock, and Jimmy was on his way home through a narrow, and somewhat darkened street, he suddenly became conscious of footsteps close behind him.

There was that in the sound that made him start and look back in haste. Some one was coming upon him rapidly and with stealth--some one who was wearing india-rubber shoes.

The boy sprang aside--too late. He was seized roughly by the throat, and held at arm's length, whilst a gruff voice let out, "I've got you!"

Looking up, he recognized in the dim light the face of Rudolf Stork, an expression of extreme ferocity stamped upon every feature.

Afterwards, Jimmy remembered the man's words quite well, just as clearly as one often remembers on waking one's last thoughts before falling asleep.

"You defy me!" he muttered. "You'll not live to do it again."

[image]

*THE BOY SPRANG ASIDE TOO LATE. HE WAS SEIZED ROUGHLY BY THE THROAT.]*

At that, he raised his right hand, in which was something like a bar of iron, and Jimmy Burke remembered nothing more; the conscious part of him vanished, as in a flash, and left him in a weird world of darkness, nothingness and silence.

When he came to his senses, he was in bed; Aunt Marion was bending over him, and Peggy was near at hand. There were bandages about his head. Also, something was the matter with his eyes; for, before he could remember where he was, or who Peggy and Aunt Marion were, his eyes began to ache, and he was obliged to close them.

According to the doctor, it was a miracle that Jimmy had escaped with his life. He had been dealt a shattering blow with some blunt instrument; he had not been found for three hours, when he was picked up by a labouring man on his way to his work in the small hours of the morning. Since there was no hospital near at hand this man had carried the unconscious boy to his own address which he had found in a note-book in the pocket of Jimmy's coat.

Peggy had immediately hastened for a doctor; and the police were informed of the identity of Rudolf Stork. For days Jimmy was delirious; and had it not been for good nursing, he could never have pulled through.

Those critical days, when the boy's life was in danger and his mind adrift, were followed by weeks of convalescence. And finally, when he was quite well again, he was so reduced in strength that it was altogether out of the question that he should think of returning to work.

And when he did try to go back to his former employment at the docks, he found that his place had been filled by another. Since the outbreak of the war, trade had been on the ebb, and work was harder than ever to find.

There followed another period of enforced idleness. And it was now winter; and grey, sunless skies, bitter winds, and constant rain and sleet, have, at the best of times, a sombre effect upon the spirits.

The boy became utterly depressed. He felt that he had no right to go on living with Aunt Marion and Peggy, though both repeatedly assured him that there was no need for him to worry. He felt that he was approaching manhood, and it was a man's duty to work. This inactivity was all the harder to bear, because the Great War was still raging with unabated fury.

At last, one evening, as he was wending his way home through Central Park, after another unsuccessful day, he decided to take his destiny into his own hands,

to take a plunge into the future, which might be fortunate or fatal, but which in any case would be decisive.

He knew quite well that what he proposed to do was wrong. He had often prayed to God for help, but that night he prayed to be forgiven.

That evening he opened a small box of tools which his father had given him years ago, and taking out a steel file, set to work on "Swiftsure Burke's" lucky sixpence, which he deliberately filed in half.

That took him the best part of half an hour; and it was almost as great a business to punch a hole through each separate half. He was not quite sure where he had heard of the old, time-worn superstition of dividing a lucky sixpence. Perhaps his father and mother had done something of the kind, in the days when they were young.

He wrapped up a few of his most necessary belongings in a towel; and when he had done that he went downstairs and found Peggy in the sitting-room. Aunt Marion had gone to bed.

"Peggy," said he, "I'm going away."

"Going away!" she repeated. "Where?"

"I'm going right away. I can't stay here idle any longer. I'm going to try to do my duty."

She came towards him, and a little nervously laid a hand upon his arm.

"Jimmy," she said, "you're not serious, are you?"

It took him quite a long time to convince her that he was really in earnest; then, without another word, she gave him what he asked for--a bottle of water and a loaf of bread. This he put into his bundle; and then it was that he produced the two halves of the dented, lucky sixpence, which had saved the life of the Admiral.

What he had to say he said altogether clumsily, and even blushed as he said it. He explained that he wanted to give her something by which she would always remember him, and he thought half his lucky sixpence might meet the case; indeed, it was all he had. Before he had finished speaking there were tears in Peggy's eyes.

She did not endeavour to dissuade him from going. But she told him that Aunt Marion would never forget it, if he went away without seeing her. Jimmy, however, felt that he had not sufficient moral courage to resist further persuasions, and in this case it was kinder to be cruel.

It was very late when he let himself out, and set off walking rapidly in the direction of the docks. Peggy did not sleep that night; hour after hour, she lay awake, her pillow wetted with tears, gripping tightly in her hand her half of the Admiral's sixpence.

Jimmy knew his way about New York harbour. He knew where the ships were moored, and how to elude the night-watchmen and the dockyard police. He

had tried, time and again, to work his way to England, as a cabin boy or a steerage hand, and had failed. There was no other way but this.

Stealthily, he made his way along the wharves, creeping in and out among bales and boxes of cargo. A large tramp steamer, the "Harlech," which belonged to Jason, Stileman and May, was under steam, bound for Portsmouth, due to sail some time the following day.

From behind a great crane, similar to that at which he himself had once been wont to work, Jimmy took stock of the "Harlech." Her after-gangway was lowered, a lantern suspended at the top. The night-watchman patrolled the main deck, pausing now and again to relight his pipe. Presently, the man went forward to the forecastle; and Jimmy seizing his opportunity, slipped up the gangway, crossed the after-well deck, and tumbled down the hatch.

It was a sheer drop of ten feet at least. Luckily for the boy, he fell upon soft bags of oats. Scrambling to his feet, he passed onward, stumbling repeatedly, for the hold was so dark he could not see a yard before him.

More by good luck than by good management, he came upon the lower hatchway, which connected with the hold beneath. Lowering himself with the utmost care, he found a firm footing upon a great pile of boxes; and passing over these, he found a place where he could sit down and where there was little chance that he would be discovered. There, he waited nearly twenty-four hours, during which time he had nothing to eat but his loaf of bread, whilst he ran a great risk of his presence being detected, for the time of sailing was put off until late on the following night.

There were rats in the hold, but he did not mind them in the least. All that he cared about was that he should remain undiscovered until the ship was well out at sea. He had no wish to be put ashore at Cape Race or Halifax.

Soon after sunrise, he heard the feet of men moving on the deck above, and this continued throughout the day, whilst the winches rattled and groaned. Fortunately for him, they were working on the forward holds, and though the after-hatches were still open, there was apparently no more cargo for that part of the ship. All this time the engines were throbbing violently. There was a kind of continuous vibration throughout the length and breadth of the ship which continued far into the night. It must have been almost ten o'clock, when suddenly a voice rang out--the voice of a man whom Jimmy was destined to know, whom he was to learn to honour and admire. It was the voice of Captain Crouch.

"Mr. Dawes," came the voice, "all hands aboard?"

"All aboard, sir."

"Then man the windlass, and let her go. We're mighty late as it is."

A moment later, Jimmy heard the bell ring in the engine-room and the "Harlech" was under way.

She steamed slowly out of New York harbour, passing Liberty Island and the forts. Jimmy--though he could see nothing but the outline of great packing-cases and boxes, dimly visible in the half-light that crept down through the open hatchway--pictured in his imagination the great sky-scrapers around Wall Street, and the towering buildings in Madison Square, fading gradually out of sight in the bright moonshine that flooded New York harbour.

From time to time, the bell rang in the engine-room; and then, the "Harlech" slowed down to drop the pilot. And Jimmy Burke knew that he, too, had dropped the pilot on the long voyage of life.

His heart was beating rapidly in excitement and vague anticipation. The Past had not been altogether happy. The Future was in the clouds.

And then, once again, came the voice of Captain Crouch.

"Mr. Dawes, close that after-hatch."

Jimmy heard the men at work under the boatswain on the deck above; and then, all was utter darkness and silence. The hatch had been battened down.

A little after, the "Harlech" took on a roll, as she struck the broad Atlantic, and took up her course for the Fastnet on the south coast of Ireland, nearly three thousand miles away. The grandson of "Swiftsure Burke" was bound for the shores of the Motherland which he could only just remember, and the Great War that thundered in the East.

# CHAPTER VI--Captain Crouch

At about ten o'clock in the morning of the day the "Harlech" sailed, whilst Jimmy Burke lay in hiding in the hold among the packing-cases and boxes of cargo, Captain Crouch was ushered into the offices of Jason, Stileman and May.

Now, those who know nothing of Captain Crouch are unacquainted with one of the most singular personalities it were possible to imagine. He knew the world as few men know it, from Yokohama to Valparaiso, from Hudson Bay to Hobart. Indeed, his strange and varied experiences would fill a book, which could certainly never be published at less than a guinea net.

As a boy, he had sold newspapers in the crowded streets of London. From that he had risen to command a merchant ship. He had been shipwrecked time

and again. He had been shot in the right eye with a poisoned arrow, somewhere at the back-of-beyond on the West Coast of Africa, which is called "The White Man's Grave." He had had a foot bitten off by a shark in the Bay of Fernando Po. And yet, in spite of his cork foot and his glass eye, he was more than a match for most men. Though he was not much more than five feet four in height, he was as wiry as a ferret, and as quick in all his movements. He feared no man, and was a rifle and revolver shot who seldom missed his mark. He had a threefold reputation: he was one of the most intrepid explorers in the world; he had shot tigers in the Sunderbunds and rogue-elephants in the forests of the Congo. As a master mariner, he had sailed the seven seas for the greater part of his life, was a skilful navigator, and one who could keep his head in an emergency.

Such a man was Crouch. Those who have read of his doings elsewhere know that, on a former occasion, he penetrated to the reaches of the Hidden River, in the unexplored valley of the Kasai, and there unearthed both a modern slave-trader and a ruby mine. It was also Captain Crouch who ventured into the trackless region of the Aruwimi, in search of Edward Harden, the lost explorer, of whom nothing had been heard for four years; and how he succeeded in his quest, and all the adventures that befell him, have been written of elsewhere.

In fact, Crouch was a man to whom adventure was as the very breath of his nostrils; the spirit of adventure flowed in the blood of his veins. He sought perilous enterprises because his idea of life was danger, because he understood that in this world the main duty of man was to accomplish. And Crouch accomplished much. He was one of the pioneers of civilization, one of those who go before the flag that trade is said to follow. He was as much out of his element in a comfortable armchair before a winter's fireside, as a backwoodsman in a boudoir. He belonged to the life of the open air, of the free and rolling sea. Indeed, it may even be said that his little, shrunk and wizened figure was a kind of stormy petrel: his very presence was a certain signal that danger and adventure were at hand.

And thus, it is hardly likely, on the face of things, that at the outbreak of the Great War such a man would remain idle for long. Even had he not sought employment of his own free will, there were those who knew of him by reputation, who were only too eager to enlist his services.

He had been found in London, at the Explorers' Club in Bond Street, which is a great place of a winter's evening, where you may hear tales which are as wonderful as they are true. He had been asked to leave at once for New York, on a certain dangerous mission. He had been given five minutes in which to make up his mind; and that was exactly four minutes and fifty-nine seconds longer than he required.

He arrived in New York in a sailor's jacket, with brass buttons which would have been none the worse for a polish. He wore a flaming red tie, and gum boots

such as seamen wear when the decks are running with salt water and the funnels white with foam. His face was as wrinkled as a date, the colour of tan, beaten for years by sun and wind and rain. His nose was large, and hooked like an eagle's. He had a small moustache, and beneath his underlip a little imperial beard, which he was wont to tug whenever he was vexed or deep in thought. As he entered the spacious offices of Jason, Stileman and May, he carried in his right hand a seaman's kit-bag, and in the other, a small mahogany box about six inches long.

He was greeted by Peggy Wade.

"Captain Crouch?" she asked.

"Miss," said he, "the same."

"Mr. Jason is expecting you," said Peggy. "Will you be so good as to wait?"

Crouch regarded Peggy. The girl--whose own custom it was to look people straight in the face--found the penetrating and unflinching stare of Captain Crouch a somewhat trying ordeal.

"You're a well-spoken lass," said he, at last, "and well looking, too. Come, stay there a bit," he added, seeing that Peggy made as if to go; "stay there a bit, my girl. I'll polish up the glass eye, and have a better look at you."

And at that, to Peggy's horror and consternation, Crouch slipped out his glass eye, threw it up in the air and caught it, as though it had been a marble, and then proceeded to polish it violently on the shiny sleeve of his coat.

That done, he put it back again in the socket, and looked at Peggy even harder than before.

"Seems fair," said he. "You're a lass after my own heart; neat, trim and shipshape. I've half a mind to adopt you."

Peggy could not restrain a smile.

"I don't know," she said, "that I ever exactly wished to be adopted."

Crouch looked thoroughly amazed.

"Why, my girl," said he, quite slowly, shaking his head in a doleful manner, "you've no right notion what kind of man I am. I could tell you stories that would make that curly hair of yours stand right up on end, like the bristles on the neck of a pig. And maybe, some day, p'raps, you'd learn to love me--like a father."

To speak the truth, Peggy was by now a little frightened. In all of her somewhat limited experience, she had never come across such an extraordinary and eccentric individual. She knew nothing then of Crouch's iron will and dauntless courage; she knew nothing of his deeds upon the Congo or Aruwimi. She had more than a suspicion that the little sea-captain was not quite right in the head.

"I think," she said, "I had better tell Mr. Jason you are here."

"No haste," said Crouch. "My cargo won't be aboard till daybreak to-morrow morning, and I reckon all he has got to say to me won't take above ten minutes."

None the less, Peggy thought it advisable to announce the little sea-captain's

arrival to Mr. Jason, Junior, the New York agent, and a nephew of the senior partner of the firm. Mr. Jason, who just then was busy at the telephone, replied that he would see Captain Crouch in a minute, and Peggy returned to the waiting-room.

The following incident--though of little value in itself--goes a long way to prove that Captain Crouch was both an observant man upon whom little or nothing was lost, whose single eye was as good as most men's two, and one who was by no means devoid of sentiment and consideration for others.

"My lass," said he, the moment Peggy entered, "a halved sixpence is a lover's token. Who gave it you?"

At first, Peggy was inclined to resent this blunt allusion, which she regarded as a little too personal. Only the night before, she had bade farewell to Jimmy, and even then tears were not so far from her eyes. She had hung her half of the lucky sixpence around her neck on a little chain; and she saw no reason why she should confide her innermost feelings to Captain Crouch, who, after all, was a stranger.

Now, this--as we have said--to the everlasting credit of the little, wizened captain: somewhere beneath his hardened visage, his rough manners and his almost violent way of talking, there was a heart as soft as a woman's. He saw, at once, that Peggy's feelings had been hurt, that he had touched a tender chord, and he did his best to make amends. When he spoke again, it was in a voice quite different, much softer and full of sympathy.

"I've no wish, my lass," said he, "to pry into your secrets. I only asked, because I took a kind of fancy to you, the moment I saw you; and that, as a general rule, is not my way with women. I'm a single man. I've never married for two reasons: first, no one wanted to marry me; second, I never wanted to. I can only remember two women in my life with whom--as I might say--I was ever on speaking terms. One was my landlady in Pimlico, who thought she knew more about cooking than I did; and the other was an old negress, black as a lump of charcoal, who did my washing at Sierra Leone. She weighed seventeen stone, and was about as broad as an oil-tank steamer in the Bosphorus. So if I've hurt your feelings, miss, you must forgive a rough sea-faring man, who has had his port-light put out by a poisoned arrow, and who doesn't know any better."

And at that, he held out a hand so eagerly and frankly that Peggy could not refrain from taking it.

She experienced then, for the first time, what manner of a man was Captain Crouch--if a shake of the hand counts for anything, as it is generally thought to do. Indeed, he gripped her hand so tightly that she was obliged to wince; and noticing that, he forthwith apologized, by telling her once again that he was an old sea-dog more used to marling-spikes than lassies.

"I'm sorry," said Peggy, "I was so foolish as to think you too inquisitive."

"Say no more," said Crouch.

"But, I will," she took him up. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know, for this sixpence once belonged to a sailor."

"I know the breed," said Crouch, "and just because he was a sailor, I guarantee he never kept it long."

Peggy laughed aloud, and shook her head.

"He kept it many years," she answered, "for this lucky sixpence once saved his life. You can see for yourself," she went on, "it is dented and covered with lead from a bullet. It belonged to an Admiral, whose name was 'Swiftsure Burke.'"

Captain Crouch drove the fist of one hand into the palm of the other.

"Known throughout the Navy," he exclaimed, "and to every right-thinking sailor that ever sailed the ocean who takes a pride in the job! Admiral 'Swiftsure Burke' of Sebastopol. Lass, you've got a jewel in that lucky sixpence that I wouldn't exchange for a diamond as big as a monkey-nut. Stick to it, and you'll come to no harm. It's what, in a manner of speaking, you might call a talisman. It'll protect you from fire, shipwreck, sudden death and the Income Tax. You're in luck's way, my girl."

Now Captain Crouch was a man who knew that God alone could give good fortune, or permit evil to fall upon one, but he had all a sailor's superstition and belief in omens and talismans, and was quite sincere in what he said to Peggy.

It was then that the door of the inner office was thrown open, and Mr. Jason, Junior, entered the room. He was a man who could not have been more than thirty-four years of age, clean-shaven and a little prematurely bald. He was immaculately dressed, a small orchid in his buttonhole and a pair of exceedingly shiny patent leather boots making him look as if he had just come out of a band-box.

"Captain Crouch," said he, coming forward, and holding out a hand, "I'm delighted to see you. I have a very important matter to discuss. Miss Wade," he added, turning to Peggy, "if any one else calls, you will say I am engaged."

At that, he conducted Captain Crouch into his office, and was careful to close the door.

Crouch seated himself in a comfortable chair. As for Mr. Jason, he walked backwards and forwards from the hearthrug to the writing-desk, with the restless activity of a man who has something on his mind.

"Captain Crouch," he repeated, speaking abruptly, "I can scarcely exaggerate the extremely perilous nature of the task I have undertaken. I sent for you, because I know no other man to whom I would care to entrust so great a responsibility."

Crouch yawned, and thrusting a hand into one of his coat pockets, produced a tobacco-pouch, made of snake-skin, and about as large as a letter-case.

"Mr. Jason," said he, "with your permission, I'll light a pipe. Maybe, you've

no objection to Bull's Eye Shag. There's some people that don't hold with it, but I don't suppose that would apply to you."

Now, Mr. Jason knew Crouch's tobacco of old, and he knew that it was powerful and pungent enough to fumigate anything from an isolation hospital to a greenhouse. It was a brand of tobacco--if the truth be told--for which there was no great demand, since he who smoked it required the digestive organs of an ostrich. Its aroma would cling to a bare room for days. The path of Captain Crouch through this populous and sinful world was strewn with dead flies, wasps and beetles which had been poisoned by the fumes of his tobacco.

Accordingly, Mr. Jason--though he gave Crouch full permission to light his pipe--took the double precaution of opening the window and lighting one of his strongest cigars. Then, still pacing the room, he fired at the little sea-captain a series of questions in a quick, nervous voice.

"When will the 'Harlech' be loaded?"

"To-night, sir. Soon after nine."

"With what kind of cargo?"

"You should know that as well as I," said Crouch. "There's a few tons of oats, a certain amount of machinery, and several cases of rifles."

"Ah," said Mr. Jason.

"I said so," said the other, looking hard at the agent, whose conduct was rather strange. Mr. Jason repeated over and over again, as if to himself, the one word "rifles," and was then silent for more than a minute, puffing vigorously at his cigar.

"I suppose you've heard," said he, at last, "that several German cruisers and commerce destroyers are abroad on the Atlantic?"

"I've heard tell of it," said Crouch, quite unmoved.

"Exactly. There is the 'Kronprinz Wilhelm' and the 'Königsberg,' and moreover, the 'Karlsruhe' and the 'Dresden.' Also--as, perhaps, you know--the English Channel and the Irish Sea are said to be swarming with enemy submarines, sent out from Wilhelmshaven and Kiel. You realize all that, of course?"

"Seems fair," said Crouch. "I'm ready to take my chance."

"You'll take a greater chance than you think," said Mr. Jason.

"How so, sir?"

"The fact is," said the agent, drawing nearer to the captain, and speaking in a voice that was little above a whisper; "the fact is, that although the cases are not marked, there is some reason to suppose that German agents in New York suspect that the 'Harlech' has a cargo of small-arms for the British Government."

Crouch whistled softly to himself.

"You mean," said he, "there's a chance that the secret has leaked out. This place teems with spies."

"I can say no more," said Mr. Jason, "than that we suspect; but, these times, we can be sure of nothing. It is quite possible that the German commerce destroyers may be warned, and you will be run down in mid-ocean. There may even be spies on board."

"If I find one," said Crouch, "I'll know how to deal with him."

"That's not the point," said the other. "Are you willing to take the risk?"

Captain Crouch got to his feet, carefully knocked out his pipe in the fire-grate, and then thrust his peaked sailor's cap on to the side of his head.

"Why not?" said he, at last.

Mr. Jason smiled.

"I thought you wouldn't hesitate."

"Why not?" repeated Crouch. "If those are my orders, I'll do my best to carry them out, and I'll sight the Needles and take on a pilot in the Solent, if a sound knowledge of navigation and steam coal can do it."

Mr. Jason held out a hand.

"I'm glad I sent for you," said he. "You will start to-night?"

"We'll be under way," said Crouch, "before eleven, at the latest."

"Then, good-bye--and the best of fortune."

A few minutes later, Captain Crouch, who had just taken an almost affectionate farewell of Peggy Wade, was stumping on his cork foot along the Fifth Avenue as if he owned New York.

# CHAPTER VII--In the Hold

We know already that Crouch went on board that night, shortly before ten o'clock, and took over the command of the "Harlech" from Mr. Dawes, the Chief Officer--a blunt, plain-spoken Yorkshireman, who had run away to sea at the age of fourteen, and who, like Crouch himself, had worked his way from the forecastle to the bridge.

Now, Captain Crouch encircled by the atrocious perfume of his famous Bull's Eye Shag, holding forth upon the subject of his experiences in various parts of the world, and Captain Crouch upon the bridge or in the chart-room of the ship that he commanded, were two very different men. Once he set foot upon the

main deck--even the very moment he grasped the gangway hand-rope--Crouch took upon himself the character of a martinet. In the very tones of his voice, one was led to understand that his word was law.

In most things--and in the art of seamanship most of all--Crouch relied upon no one but himself. He knew his job, and expected others to know theirs. He maintained an iron discipline, exacting the maximum of work from every ship's officer and member of the crew, from the cook's mate (who was not sufficiently intelligent to be trusted with anything else but the peeling of potatoes) to Mr. Dawes himself.

The first signs of daybreak were faintly visible in the east when the "Harlech" struck the ocean, where the great billows came rolling westward across three thousand miles of water, to break in clouds of foam upon the low-lying shore that extends for miles to the south of Sandy Hook. Immediately, she took on that well-known corkscrew motion--which is part roll, part pitch--that finds out the land-lubber soon enough, and often tests the sea legs of even an old, weather-beaten sailor.

Now, when a ship does this, he who has ever known the true and inward meaning of *mal de mer*--which is a polite word for sea-sickness--will be well advised to keep himself amidships and on deck. And Jimmy Burke was neither one nor the other.

With the hatchway closed and the engine-room adjacent, the hold had become quite hot and stuffy. When the bows dipped in the waves and the white spray flew wide above the forecastle-peak, the poop rose like a hunter at a five-bar gate, to fall again quite suddenly, as if descending to the nether regions. Moreover, when the stern part of the ship was clear of the water, even for a moment, the screw raced as if demented, shaking the old tramp so violently that it seemed as if every bolt and bar and rivet must sooner or later be jangled out of place.

Three hours of this, and poor Jimmy Burke believed, indeed, that his last hour had come. He had long since consumed his loaf of bread; and no doubt the pangs of hunger, added to the constant darkness and the stifling atmosphere in which he was forced to remain, did much to augment the symptoms of an illness from which surely the grandson of "Swiftsure Burke" should never have suffered. However, we record plain facts, and the whole truth must out: the boy was incontestably sea-sick.

For all that, he would not accept defeat. Though he yearned for a breath of fresh air, though he felt that he could stand no longer this intolerable, impenetrable darkness, he would not climb the iron ladder leading to the hatch and cry out for help. As he knew well enough, the ship was not yet so far away from the coast; and Crouch might put about and set the stowaway ashore at some forsaken port where the boy would be stranded and even further from his goal than on the

day he left New York.

In this life, there is a maxim above all others to remember: that Providence helps only those that help themselves. Each man works out his own position. God has given to all of us, to some freely, to others sparingly, talents and attainments. It is for us to be always true to ourselves, to make the best use of what abilities we have, and continually to strive. And then, often, when a fainter heart would have ceased to hope, we find ourselves on a sudden face to face with the realization of our dreams.

So was it now with Jimmy Burke, sea-sick and disconsolate. He was resolute by nature. Right or wrong, he had made up his mind; he had chosen his own course after due deliberation. He was sorely tried--as, no doubt, he deserved to be--but he meant to go through with it, cost him what it might. As we shall see, all that follows hangs upon the fact that he remained until that night in the silence and darkness of the after-hold. Had he become faint-hearted, had he made known his presence on the ship, the fate of a certain German submarine--the U93--would never have been sealed in such a manner as it was. And thus, we see how in this world all happenings are strung together in what may be called a "chain of circumstance," wherein each link, or separate component part, is quite unlike its fellows.

When night fell, the ship was far out at sea. And this was the third night that Jimmy had spent on board. He had no way of telling the hour, except that during the night-time he could hear neither footsteps on the well-deck above nor the moving of chains and hawsers. The ship's bell was forward, and could not be heard in the hold so long as the hatch was closed.

The ship still rolled considerably. The storm showed no sign of abating. There is nothing more exhausting than sea-sickness; and during these three interminable days the boy experienced little difficulty either in falling asleep or remaining asleep for hours.

How long he slept in the earlier part of the night he was never afterwards able to say. He was conscious of waking with a start, and sat bolt upright, listening, not knowing what he expected to hear.

Suddenly, with alarming clearness, three strokes of a bell smote upon the silence of the night.

Jimmy was more than a little surprised. He had heard nothing during the whole term of his self-imposed imprisonment but the constant creaking of the ship, the throbbing of the engines, the persistent gnawing sound of rats, and the periodical groaning of the steam steering-gear. Never before had the ship's bell been audible in the depths of the after-hold. The conclusion was obvious: one of the after-hatchways had been opened. Also, it was three bells of the middle watch, or--in other words--half-past one in the morning.

The boy got stealthily to his feet, and peered over an enormous packing-case, behind which he had been sleeping. Immediately, it was as if he was blinded by the bright light of a lantern, not ten yards from where he stood.

It took some time for his eyes to become accustomed to the glare; and then he was able to perceive the figure of a man who, holding the lantern in his hand, was slowly descending the iron ladder into the hold.

Jimmy felt his heart thumping against his ribs. He was in danger of being discovered. He even feared that in some way or other his presence on the ship had already become known, and this man had been sent to fish him out, as a salmon is landed in a net. Though he knew that the time was bound to come when he would find himself face to face with Captain Crouch, and would have to explain who he was, he dreaded it, none the less.

At the foot of the ladder the man paused and looked up, remaining for as long as a minute in an attentive attitude, as if he were listening. Then he placed the lantern on the top of a pile of boxes, and thrusting a hand into his coat pocket, produced a large chisel and a hammer.

With these, to Jimmy's infinite alarm, he approached the very packing-case behind which the boy was hiding, and without waste of time set to work in a manner that was at once business-like and guilty. With a series of smart taps of the hammer, he drove in the chisel in several places under the lid, which he then proceeded to prise open. It took him five minutes or more to complete his task. He seemed anxious to do the job as silently as he could; but he appeared in no hurry, for he paused frequently to listen, and did not continue with his work until he was assured that no one was on deck.

All this time Jimmy was crouching low behind the packing-case, which the man was opening from the other side. Though they were hidden from view of one another, they could not have been more than two yards apart. It was a situation which might have been comical, had it not been fraught with danger.

The lid of the box opened with that peculiar squeaking noise which invariably accompanies the drawing of nails from out of soft, new wood. Apparently the man removed from the top of the box a certain amount of brown paper and waterproof sheeting; and then, on seeing its contents, he gave vent to a loud exclamation, which might have been anything from an expression of satisfaction to an oath.

A moment after, he turned upon his heel, and went back for his lantern; and then it was that Jimmy seized the opportunity to gratify the curiosity which by now had taken the place of alarm in his somewhat heated brain. There was a wide crack in the lid of the box through which it was possible to see; and placing his eye to this, he found himself looking down into a box that was filled with, at least, two dozen Lee-Metford rifles.

He crouched down again, as the man drew near once more. He had still no desire to be caught. He had not yet had time to think matters out; it was all too much of a mystery. He could not associate three facts: his own presence in the hold, the box full of rifles, and the man who had come like a thief, who now closed the lid, hammering in the nails as quietly as he could, and who then, without the slightest warning, swinging his lantern in his hand, stepped round the box--and came face to face with Jimmy.

The boy jumped to his feet. He had no thought of escape; and even had that been so, his case was hopeless, for he was seized immediately by the lapel of his coat.

"By James!" let out the sailor. "And who are you?"

Jimmy Burke was altogether speechless; for, looking up, in the bright light of the lantern, he found himself confronted by the seamed and heavy features of Rudolf Stork.

# CHAPTER VIII--A False Witness

It was the face of Rudolf Stork. It was the same face that Jimmy had seen on that other occasion when he had been discovered hiding in the cupboard in Rosencrantz's office--with this difference, Stork had now grown a beard.

It was a black beard--coal black, and short and crisp--that made the man look more villainous than ever. Though it hid the cruel wrinkles about his mouth, it made it seem as if his lower jaw protruded like a gorilla's. Before, Stork had looked both fierce and cunning; he now gave one the impression of being akin to a savage beast.

"It's you!" cried Stork, and repeated the words several times as if unable to believe the evidence of his eyes. "It's you! By thunder, what's the game?"

"A stowaway," said Jimmy.

"A stowaway!" said the man. "I don't need telling that when I find you skulking here at dead of night, and the ship two days from port."

"Take me to the captain," said the boy. "I am ready to take the penalty for what I have done."

"You are?" said Stork. Then he must have remembered something, for thrusting his tongue into his cheek, he rolled his eyes. "Easy now," said he. "These cards must be carefully played. A stowaway!" he cried. "I'll not believe it."

"I have not denied it," answered Jimmy.

"Because you're something worse," let out the other.

"Worse!"

"Yes, worse. We're on the high seas, where a man can speak his mind without fear of contradiction; and if I choose to lay a charge who's to gainsay me? Answer me that."

"I don't understand," said Jimmy Burke.

"Ye don't, and small credit to your wits. Here's me, Rudolf Stork, a ship's carpenter, and an honest man, who goes into the hold on right and lawful business. And there what do I find prying among the cargo, like a muzzled ferret in a ditch, but a brat of a German spy, caught red-handed at his work."

Stork pointed at the packing-case upon which he had laid his chisel and hammer.

"But these tools are yours!" cried Jimmy, who now felt his cheeks burning in indignation.

"Just so," said Stork. "I left them here this morning."

Jimmy gasped. It was not easy to believe that such outrageous perfidy were possible. Indeed, it took him some little time to realize the full meaning of the man's words. But the more he thought of it the more apparent it became that he would find it extremely difficult to prove his innocence. How was he to convince Captain Crouch of the truth--that it was Stork himself who was a spy? The captain would laugh in his face. Such a retort is the common experience of fools. The cry of "You're another!" is the wit of the gutter-snipe that can never carry conviction. Jimmy recognized, with a growing sense of alarm, that in all probability he would shortly find himself in the position of an accused man who had no evidence to call on his own behalf.

"Do you mean to say," he exclaimed, "that you intend to accuse me of the very crime of which you yourself are guilty?"

"I'm here," said Stork, quite calmly, "to bandy words with no one. If I say you're guilty, then guilty you are, unless you can prove contrariwise. Which isn't likely so far as I can see."

Upon the man's face there was an expression of half-amused contempt. He had the appearance of being wholly confident and quite unperturbed. A sort of half-smile played about his lips. This augured ill for Jimmy, who realized that in Rudolf Stork he had an opponent who was both without a sense of honour and

well practised in the art of deceiving others.

The man picked up his lantern, which, whilst speaking to Jimmy, he had set down upon the ground, and then turned to go. It was then that the boy made a quick movement forward in the direction of the iron ladder that led to the deck above.

"We'll go together," he cried. "Your story and mine are not likely to agree."

At that, Stork whipped round with a kind of snarl, and without a word of warning, and clenching his fist, he dealt the boy a swinging blow in the face that sent him reeling backward.

Jimmy staggered, stumbled and fell. For a moment he was half dazed. He could still see--but indistinctly, as if through a gauze screen--the flare of Stork's lantern which swung up and down, as the ship rolled from side to side.

By the time the boy had recovered his senses sufficiently to scramble to his feet he was again in utter darkness. The great boxes and bales of cargo were only just discernible in the dim light that came through the opened hatchway above. There, he could see a few stars, appearing at odd moments, to vanish almost immediately behind the narrow, long-drawn clouds that streaked a wind-blown sky. He could hear the waves, one after the other, beating violently against the sides of the ship, the water washing over the decks and along the scuttles, the rigging creaking, and the long chain of the steam steering-gear jolting, from time to time, as the great strain of a heavy sea was brought to bear upon the rudder. And then four bells rang out; it was two o'clock in the morning.

Jimmy, crossing the hold, reached the iron ladder, and set foot upon the bottom rung. The very moment he did so the figures of two men appeared upon the well-deck above, one of whom Jimmy recognized at once as Stork.

"He's in there?" asked a voice.

"Aye, aye, sir," answered Stork. "I found him at work among the cargo like a half-starved rat."

"Get down," said Captain Crouch, for the other voice was his; "go down and fish him out."

Stork was not slow to obey the captain's orders; and a moment later the stowaway found himself upon the deck, standing ankle-deep in running water, face to face with a man who was not so tall as the boy himself, and who was clothed in a suit of bright red pyjamas, the trousers of which were rolled up to his knees, so that the lower part of his legs was bare.

"Bring him along to my cabin," said Crouch. "I'll not stand talking here; it's a trifle too cold, I'm thinking, for a man who has spent a good slice of his life in the equatorial parts."

The captain led the way to the main-deck. As he ran up the companion-ladder on the starboard side, Jimmy noticed how extremely agile he was in all

his movements. Though at this time of his life Captain Crouch must have been approaching fifty years of age, he was as active as a young man; and, indeed, had it not been for his cork foot, he would have been prepared to back himself in a hundred yards race against any man of not less than half his years.

On board the "Harlech" the captain's cabin was situated at the forward end of the main-deck, immediately under the bridge and next to the chart-room. Here an oil lamp was burning which Crouch turned up so high that the chimney smoked. He then picked up his pipe, filled it with his terrible and strange tobacco, and seating himself upon a plush-covered divan, proceeded to fill the room with smoke.

Stork, holding Jimmy by the sleeve of his coat, in much the same manner as a policeman takes his charge to the nearest station, led the boy into the room, and then closed the door.

"Now," said Crouch, "where's your evidence?"

Jimmy interposed. Thrusting forward both hands, in the attitude of one who begs for mercy, he implored to be allowed to speak. But Crouch, by describing a series of imaginary circles in the air with the stem of his pipe, intimated that he desired Jimmy to remain silent.

"One thing at a time," said he, "as my friend, Ned Harden, observed, when he shot a crocodile with one barrel and a rhino with the other. That was with an old-fashioned shot-and-ball gun that he got from a trader at Lokoja, in the days when there weren't above ten white men on the Upper Niger. I hear the evidence for the prosecution first, which--to the best of my belief--is in accordance with the law. Afterwards, my lad, you'll have full opportunity to speak. And now, then, what's the charge?"

Rudolf Stork told his story with simplicity, and a kind of easy tolerance, as if he was really a little bored; and though he was cleverly cross-examined by Captain Crouch, never once did he contradict his former statements. Had his evidence been given on oath, he would have perjured himself with no less assurance and without hesitation. His manner, no less than the directness of his narrative, would have deceived any jury in the world. And in any case, Captain Crouch--one who knew more than his fair share of the tricks of rogues and the ways of evil men--was led to a firm conviction that the boy was really guilty.

Stork lied his soul away--or what can remain of a soul in a man who has sunk to such great depths of infamy. He swore that he had been working in the hold that very morning, and had gone back to fetch his chisel and hammer. He had found the stowaway in the very act of opening one of the packing-cases, which he had discovered were filled with new short service-rifles for the British Army.

Crouch, when he heard this, made a wry face, and looked at Jimmy. He had not forgotten that Mr. Jason had warned him that he might find German spies

on board; and though there was no direct proof, the evidence, as given by Rudolf Stork, was very black against the boy. He had no reason to doubt Stork's word. The man had been engaged at New York with a good character, and he seemed a capable ship's carpenter, who understood his work.

"Speak up, my lad," said Crouch--the expression upon whose thin, wizened face had hardened--"speak up, and say nothing but the truth."

Now, in those who are at all sensitive, indignation is one of the most deep-seated emotions that exist. Smarting with a sense of injured innocence, the boy's cheeks were already burning; and now, something rose in his throat as if to choke him, so that he found it difficult to speak. When words came, at last, they did so in a flood, and were only half coherent. Small wonder that Captain Crouch took all this as a sure sign that the boy was unquestionably guilty!

"I'll speak the truth, sir," poor Jimmy blurted out. "I know for a fact that it is this man, and not myself, who is a German spy. He is in the pay of the Prussian Secret Service, and was engaged in New York by a certain Baron von Essling, as he himself knows quite well. As for me, I came on board this ship as a stowaway, because I wanted to go to England. I wished to serve my country."

Crouch sprang suddenly to his feet.

"Enough of this!" he roared. "Do I look like a man who would swallow a yarn like that? My word, they're not over-squeamish when they take on a boy like you to do their dirty work. I've heard tell of women spies, but I never guessed they would employ mere children for the game."

"Sir," cried Jimmy, "I swear, I speak the truth."

"I'll hear no more!" Crouch almost shouted. "You know well enough that the penalty for a spy in time of war is death. I'm not quite certain whether I should be acting according to the law, if I strung you up to the yard-arm like a dead crow in a cornfield. And then, there's the cat-o'-nine-tails. Maybe, you've heard of that? If you had proved to be no more than a simple stowaway, I should have had a sort of kindred feeling; for, I ran away to sea myself, and so did Dawes, and many another sailor who's worth the salt he eats. When I was a boy, the 'cat' was not unheard of; but, nowadays, I doubt if I'd be within my rights in using it upon the likes of you."

It was then, at last, that poor Jimmy Burke broke down. He could suppress neither the sobs that were surging in his breast nor the tears that he felt rushing to his eyes. Falling into a chair that stood vacant at his elbow, he buried his face in his hands.

For a full minute his shoulders shook and trembled; and when he looked up, his face was all streamed and marked with tears. He saw that Crouch's lips were pressed tight together; there was an expression of settled and immovable resolution upon the face of the little captain. But, the bitterest blow of all was

that Rudolf Stork was laughing, his white teeth visible in the blackness of his beard.

"I'm innocent!" let out the boy.

"You can prove that in Court," said Crouch. "The very moment we are tied up in Portsmouth Harbour, I hand you over to the police. You shall have a fair trial, with a proper judge in a wig and all the rest of it; and if you're not a dead man at the end of it, this here foot's not cork."

By way of illustration of this last remark, Crouch thrust forward his cork foot which--as was quite apparent--was fastened to his bare leg by means of several straps.

"And as for the voyage," he added, "you'll work on board this ship like a galley-slave. For every knot of your journey to the Solent, you shall pay in honest labour. You can polish brasses, swab decks, wash paint, and peel potatoes, and do ought else that you can lay a hand to. Moreover, you'll report yourself every hour, from eight bells in the morning to the end of the second dog-watch, to the officer on the bridge. You'll sleep in the forecastle, and under observation. I'll not trust you out of sight. You say you're an Englishman, perhaps you may be; if so, the more disgrace to England. But, it's my belief you're a Yankee, English born, who has sold his immortal soul to the German Empire. There's many such in the States; in my thinking, they are all Germans--every mother's son of them; and I tell you frankly, I abominate them all without discrimination. And so, my lad, you've heard my mind, and you know what I think of you and those you serve. One last word of advice: as long as you're on board this ship, steer clear of me. I'm not a man who jumps rashly to conclusions, but I've sized you up according to the lights you show; and it's not probable I'll change my mind. And now," he added, turning to Stork, "take him to the fo'c'sle."

Side by side, without a word, Stork and Jimmy crossed the forward well-deck. Jimmy walked as in a dream. During the last hour so many things had happened that he found it difficult to realize that he had, indeed, been found guilty of being a German spy. In this world are traps and opportunities for tripping us all, in the most unexpected places.

For the rest of that night, poor Jimmy lay sleepless, heartbroken and disconsolate, upon a hard forecastle bunk. Things had not happened as he had either hoped or feared. He was in the very depths of despair. He had acted rashly, he knew, in endeavouring to leave America as a stowaway on board a merchant ship. But he had acted with the best of motives, from a fitting sense of patriotism. He had dreamed of the Great War, or as much of it as he had been able to imagine from the pictures he had seen in the illustrated papers. He had dreamed of flying Uhlans, captured trenches, charging hussars and cuirassiers--and now, he had been threatened with the "cat." Assuredly, there are pitfalls for us all!

# CHAPTER IX--The "Dresden"

Captain Crouch was a man who seldom--if ever--made up his mind in a hurry. It was his custom to consider every aspect of a question before he came to any definite decision; but, when once his opinions had been formed, he was not disposed to alter them. He was a hard man in many ways--one who, having had everything against him from the start, had had to make his own way in a world that is not so charitable as some may think. That Captain Crouch had made a great success of life, there can be no shadow of doubt; and it is equally certain that he was never indebted to any one throughout the whole course of his career-except later on (as we shall see) to Jimmy Burke himself.

In this particular case, he had made up his mind that Jimmy was a German spy. He had heard both sides of the question, and saw no reason to doubt the word of Rudolf Stork. In consequence, for more reasons than one, he was determined to have nothing to do with Jimmy. Not only did he hand over the stowaway for safe custody to Mr. Dawes the chief officer, but he gave strict injunctions that Jimmy was to keep out of his way--as far as that could be possible on a ship of not five thousand tons.

Life in the forecastle of an ocean tramp has little or no joys to one who has been brought up, if not in luxury, at least in decency and comfort. For the first week, the weather continued to be rough; it was bitterly cold, and they saw little of the sun. The boy had no friends on board; for the members of the crew--who laughed and joked together on the forward well-deck after working hours--following the example of the captain and the ship's officers, believed in their hearts that the boy was, indeed, a German spy, and treated him with undisguised and due contempt. From dawn to sunset, Jimmy went about his work practically ignored. No one spoke to him, except to give him orders; and these he received, not only from the chief officer and Stork, but also from any one else who happened to require assistance.

In these circumstances--as may easily be imagined--the boy was utterly miserable and almost broken-hearted. There were nights when he found it impossible

to sleep, but lay awake, hour upon hour, writhing under the great wrong that had been done him.

He soon learnt to give up all hope of ever explaining matters to Captain Crouch. He could not fail to see that he must bear his wrongs as bravely as he might. Nor could he find any sympathizer amongst the crew; one and all, they were loyal Britishers--with the sole exception of Rudolf Stork--and as such were heartily against him. Had he been subjected to physical cruelty, had he been thrashed and kicked and beaten, his lot would have been easier to bear. He thought it all out, time and again, in the darkness of the night, while the ship was ploughing her way eastward across the great Atlantic, and always came to the same sorrowful conclusion: that there was nothing he could do, but find courage in the knowledge of his own innocence, and keep an eye upon Stork.

He knew Stork to be a spy. That no one else was likely to believe it made it none the less true that, to the boy's certain knowledge, the man's services had been engaged by Rosencrantz and the Baron von Essling. Stork, beyond doubt, was on his way to England on some secret business. It was quite possible that the man had in his possession incriminating documents and papers. Jimmy realized that, if he could but find this out for certain, he would be able to convince Crouch not only of his own innocence, but of Stork's indubitable guilt.

It was this vague hope that buoyed Jimmy's spirits during the first five or six days of the voyage. By then, they had reached mid-ocean, where the presence of the Gulf Stream, and a welcome change of weather, had raised the temperature by, at least, twenty degrees. Jimmy had already discovered that Stork kept a sea-chest under his bunk in the forecastle--a strong chest, iron-bound and made of oak, fastened both by an ordinary lock and a padlock, the keys of which Stork kept on a chain, along with a jack-knife and a whistle.

There had been times when Jimmy had thought quite seriously of forcing his way into the captain's cabin, and imploring Crouch to have this chest examined, on the off chance that thereby Stork might be proved the scoundrel he was. That the boy never decided to take a step so irretrievable and final, goes a long way to prove that he was possessed of little of the gambling instinct of his father. He saw from the first that there was a good chance that the sea-chest would contain nothing of an incriminating nature, in which case he would be in a worse plight than before. Throughout all this strange, mysterious business, so much was at stake that Jimmy felt he was not entitled to risk more than he need. And it was well for him that he resolved to be discreet; for, in a manner that was at once surprising and dramatic, Providence, for the first time, came to his aid.

One morning, soon after daybreak, they sighted a British torpedo-boat-destroyer, racing due northward, travelling at a speed of almost thirty knots an hour. The destroyer, evidently wishing to speak to the "Harlech," which was not,

of course, equipped with wireless apparatus--drew to within a cable's length of the steamer, when the commander shouted through a megaphone to Captain Crouch, who was on the bridge.

"Have you heard the news?" he asked.

"What news?" asked Crouch. "We've seen no papers since we left New York, more than a week ago."

"Admiral Sturdee has thrashed the German squadron off the Falkland Islands. The 'Gneisenau,' the 'Scharnhorst,' the 'Leipzig,' and the 'Nuremburg' have been sunk; but the 'Dresden' managed to escape, and is believed to have come this way."

"I've seen nothing of her," answered Crouch.

"Do you know what she looks like?" asked the commander.

"Sure enough," said Crouch. "Protected cruiser, of about three thousand five hundred tons. Speed about twenty-four and a half. Two masts and three funnels--a trifle forward. Sister ship to the 'Emden.' Completed in 1908."

"That's her," shouted back the officer. "Sorry you haven't seen her. Goodbye, and good luck. Look out for enemy submarines," he added, "when you get into the Channel."

A moment later, the destroyer was flying on its way, cutting through the water at such a velocity that the spray was sent high into the air, to form a kind of rainbow in the sunshine immediately above her bows.

The news of the defeat of Admiral von Spee's squadron was received with delight by the ship's officers and crew of the "Harlech." That evening, for the first time during the voyage, a banjo made its appearance on the forward well-deck, and there were songs, not unconnected with the fact that England had been in the past, and would continue to be in the future, the sole mistress of the seas. Throughout these quite excusable rejoicings, it was a fact--that passed unnoticed by every one, except by Jimmy Burke--that Rudolf Stork held himself aloof, standing apart from the others, with his bare arms folded and never a smile upon his lips. Jimmy hoped that the man's surly manner would be noticed by the captain, upon whom as a rule little or nothing was lost. But Crouch paced the main-deck, with both hands behind his back, lost in thoughts of his own and a veritable cloud of the black smoke of "Bull's Eye Shag."

It was quite late at night when the forecastle, at last, was still. Six bells had sounded when the banjo was put back into its case and the crew turned in. An hour after that, Rudolf Stork was pacing the lower deck---a silent, shadowy figure in the moonlight, moving in and out among the derricks and the hatches. Jimmy Burke, lying upon his bunk at the entrance of the forecastle, watched the man for a long time, wondering what were the dark thoughts that Rudolf Stork could share with no one; and when, at last, the boy fell asleep, the ship's carpenter was

still striding to and fro, like some restless, evil spirit.

The boy was awakened suddenly by the shrill note of the boatswain's whistle. One after the other, close upon each other's heels, the crew tumbled out upon the well-deck. Simultaneously, the voice of Captain Crouch rang out, so loud as to be audible from one end of the ship to the other.

"Every man at his alarm post! Have the boats ready to be lowered; we may have need of them before we are much older. Mr. Dawes, spare every man you can to work in the engine-room like a nigger. If we can manage to squeeze fifteen knots out of the old ship, there'll be just a dog's chance that we escape."

Jimmy waited to hear no more, but, springing from his bunk, hastened out upon the deck.

A group of men was standing upon the main-deck immediately beneath the bridge, many of whom were pointing excitedly towards the east. It was dawn; and although the sun had not yet risen, the first signs of daybreak were clearly visible upon the horizon. The sea itself looked black; in the sky, a few stars still glimmered faintly. Upon the eastern sky-line extended a long belt of silver, in the immediate centre of which there could be seen a thin trail of smoke. Captain Crouch was on the bridge, with a large telescope raised to his only eye.

For the first five hours of that memorable day, the excitement that prevailed on board the "Harlech" was intense. Every one went about his work in breathless haste. Mr. Dawes shouted his orders like a madman. From time to time, the chief engineer appeared on deck to report progress from the engine-room. Every pound of coal that it was possible to throw into the furnaces would tend to increase the ship's speed, if--as Captain Crouch believed--the trail of smoke upon the far horizon came from the funnels of the "Dresden."

By eight o'clock, there was no doubt whatsoever that it was the German cruiser herself that they had sighted. A little after, it was evident that the "Dresden" was giving chase. From the well-decks only her smoke was visible, but this was rapidly growing more and more distinct. Crouch remained upon the bridge, his telescope glued to his eye; and from that altitude no doubt the hull of the German warship was visible.

Presently, from the direction of the enemy, there came a dull booming sound that died away across the great expanse of water, like the rolling sound of a monster drum. It had hardly ceased before there became audible a shrill, piercing hoot, not unlike a human shriek, that became louder and louder with alarming rapidity.

There was no need for one of the crew who had taken part in the South African War to cry out that a shell was coming. Every one on board knew what that sound meant. Following a not unnatural curiosity, every man rushed to the taffrails, to see what would be the result. There was a loud, and almost unanimous, shout of "There she goes!" as the shell plunged into the water about two hundred

yards from the starboard side of the ship, sending a great savage fountain high into the air.

By then, the "Harlech" was steaming almost due south. Her course had been changed at daybreak, when the "Dresden" had been sighted immediately ahead. The first shell, which was marvellously accurate as far as direction was concerned, must have passed immediately over the mast-head of the merchant ship.

This augured ill for the remainder of the day. There seemed little or no chance that the "Harlech" would escape, though she burnt every ton of coal she carried in her bunkers. The British destroyer had gone due north. Nowhere else, except in the direction of the "Dresden," was there a ship in sight. The "Harlech"--as we have already pointed out--was not equipped with wireless, and had no means of calling for assistance.

For the next two hours, the utmost confusion and consternation prevailed on board. A shell struck the forecastle-peak, and tore away a great piece of the ship, as a bull-dog might rend the clothes of a tramp. Another broke its way through the superstructure under the bridge; and a third, fourth and fifth, pierced the ship's sides above the water-line.

Throughout all this, Captain Crouch remained perfectly calm and collected, from time to time taking his pipe from his mouth to knock out the ash on the heel of his boot, refill it and light it with the utmost care. The "Dresden" was now well in sight, bearing straight down upon them, as a tiger might rush upon its prey. It seemed, indeed, that they were doomed.

It was about mid-day when the German cruiser signalled to them to surrender; and though there could be no question that a refusal would lead to the destruction of them all, Crouch flatly refused to acknowledge that the game was up. His only answer was to hoist the Union Jack to the mast-head and run up the Red Ensign on the poop.

The appearance of the British flag upon the high seas upon that calm, sunlit winter's morning was a hint to the captain of the German cruiser to open fire with shrapnel.

From this time onward, the decks were highly dangerous. The German gunners got the range to an inch, and managed to keep it, in spite of the fact that every minute brought them nearer and nearer to their prey. These shells exploded one after the other, in quick succession, each one with a white puff, in the very midst of the rigging; whilst the round, leaden bullets descended in a shower, to bury themselves in the teak decks or crash through the glass of the skylights.

No one faced this, with the exception of Captain Crouch; and how he managed to live in the midst of it all must ever remain a mystery. He never lost his head for a moment, but continued to give orders which, because of the constant noise of bursting shells, he was obliged to shout through a megaphone.

A ship's quartermaster, clambering up from one of the forward holds, dashed up the ladder to the bridge, which was all twisted like a corkscrew, and reported to the captain that the ship had been struck below the water-line, and was sinking by the bows. Just then there was a lull in the firing; and Crouch called the crew together, and addressed them in the following words--

"If I haul down that flag," he cried, pointing to the Union Jack, "we may live to regret it, to tell those who come after us how we surrendered like a pack of curs. I'll save you that at any rate. If we must die, we'll die like men and Britons. Come, tell me, have I spoken square and honest?"

A cheer came from the men--a cheer that was cut short by a great explosion on the poop, that carried away the round-house and a great iron bollard that had been held to the deck by four cast-iron rivets, each one as thick as a strong man's wrist. Crouch paid no heed to this, but continued, waving his pipe in his hand.

"Well spoken, lads," he cried. "Though we've got no guns of our own, we'll stick to the Flag to the last; and maybe they'll hear of it in England. And now, pay no heed to the shells, but all hands to the pumps."

The men obeyed with that business-like promptitude that is characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race. They were not disposed to argue that, after all, life was possibly worth living, and there is no more terrible death than to be drowned in calm water when the sun is shining in the midst of an illimitable sea. It was enough for them that their captain had spoken words that moved them to the depths of their rugged hearts: they were resolved to die like men.

For half-an-hour they worked in a kind of frenzy at the pumps, striving to keep the stricken ship afloat. It seemed that their efforts were successful; for, though the "Harlech" had taken on a marked list to port, and her stern was lifted a good six feet in the water, she seemed to be still seaworthy and as yet showed no signs of settling down. The "Dresden" was now not much more than four miles in the wake of the fugitive ship, which did little more than crawl.

[image]

*THE "HARLECH" HAD TAKEN A MARKED LIST TO PORT--NO ONE COULD LIVE UPON HER DECK.*

At such a range shrapnel is at its worst and deadliest. Shell after shell burst upon the "Harlech," until the masts were splintered, the decks riddled, and the rigging cut and torn in a thousand places. The top of one of the funnels had been blown away; the glass windows of the chart-house had been driven in.

Presently the shell fire became so severe, and there had been so many casu-

alties among the crew, that it became impossible to continue to work the pumps. No one could live upon the deck; and something in the nature of a stampede was made to the saloon, whither the wounded had been carried.

Jimmy, who had been working at the pumps, had been one of the last to leave. His courage had not passed unnoticed by Captain Crouch, who found himself at a loss to reconcile two facts: firstly, that Jimmy had displayed a supreme contempt for danger, and secondly, that the boy was presumed to be a German spy.

As a great shell struck the mainmast, and brought down a spar upon the deck to which was attached the tattered shreds of what had once been the flag of England, the boy sought safety in the forecastle. There, one of the first things that met his eyes was a sea-chest, the lid of which had been broken open by the force of the concussion by which it had been hurled across the deck. Upon one of the broken pieces of this box were inscribed in black lettering the two words: RUDOLF STORK.

This was no time upon which to stand upon ceremony. There is no such thing as private property in time of war--as, during the long months of this colossal combat, Europe has learnt to her cost. Jimmy Burke had suspicions of his own, which he had cause to know were well grounded. Chance had brought an opportunity to hand which he was not slow to take. In a second he was down on all fours, turning out the contents of Stork's sea-chest, which appeared to have been filled with nothing but documents and papers, the majority of which were in the handwriting of Rosencrantz, the tool of the Baron von Essling.

What these papers were Jimmy was given no opportunity of finding out; for, hardly had he picked up the first to examine it more closely, than he was suddenly seized from behind by the scruff of the neck.

With a quick movement he managed to free himself, escaping to the windlass, which is in the very peak of the ship. There he found himself cut off by Rudolf Stork, who stood immediately before him, so that there was no means of exit from the forecastle.

Stork was like a madman. He wore nothing but a shirt and a pair of trousers. Upon his left shoulder there was a patch of blood where he had been struck by a shrapnel bullet. Even in the semi-darkness of that place, Jimmy could see that the man was in such an insensate fit of fury that his eyes were gleaming like coals of fire.

With a loud oath, hurled through his teeth in the direction of the boy, he gathered his papers together in an armful, and hurled them through a port-hole into the sea.

"And now," he cried, "you infernal young dog, I'll do for you!"

Suddenly, as he picked up a marlinspike that happened to be lying close

at hand upon the deck, with an expression stamped upon every feature of his face that could mean nothing short of murder, a loud British cheer came from somewhere amidships that was clearly audible in spite of the bursting shells and the incessant thunder of the "Dresden's" guns. Stork paused in the very act of raising his weapon to strike.

"What's that?" he cried.

No sooner had the words left his lips than the cheer was raised a second time, louder than before. And then the voice of Captain Crouch rang out, in which there was a clear note of triumph.

"Back to the pumps!" he shouted. "Boys, we'll save her yet."

# CHAPTER X--The Mysterious Message

No doubt we should always be prepared for the unexpected, but the fact remains that we very seldom are. In this case, the voice of Captain Crouch carried from one end of the ship to the other, bringing a sudden ray of hope into the heart of every man that heard it, that was like a flash of light in a darkened room.

Every living soul on board--including the ship's carpenter himself--had already given himself up for lost. The "Harlech" was apparently in a sinking condition, and under the continual and merciless fire of the enemy cruiser. They were miles from anywhere, in the very midst of the ocean; and it had seemed as if nothing could save them from a watery grave, or, at least, captivity. And suddenly, the intelligence was burst upon them that the ship might yet be saved. The crew had been ordered to return to the pumps. The unexpected had occurred.

Now, curiosity is a very natural sentiment that at times overcomes even the strongest impulse. For the moment, Stork forgot that he was on the point of committing murder; Jimmy Burke, that his life was in the greatest peril. Without a thought for one another, both rushed out upon the well-deck, to learn what had happened.

The "Harlech" still listed so much that the decks sloped at an angle of almost twenty degrees. It was then afternoon, though the sun was still high. The

"Dresden" lay to the north-east, her great guns sounding in quick succession, like peal after peal of thunder immediately overhead. Though the shells still shrieked through the rigging, or burst their way through the fragile sides of the ship, all eyes were turned towards the south, in which quarter Captain Crouch upon the bridge was directing his enormous telescope. Jimmy, regardless of his danger, dashed up the steps that led to the forecastle-peak, and shading his eyes against the glare of the sun, looked in the same direction.

It was some moments before he was able to make out anything at all; and then, suddenly, he discerned quite clearly the funnels--from each of which proceeded a thin trail of smoke--of three separate ships that appeared to be advancing in line, steaming forward with rapidity and making straight for the "Dresden."

Suddenly, Captain Crouch tucked his telescope under his arm, and shouted to Stork, who was still upon the well-deck, to take charge of the party that was again working at the pumps. And hardly had the words left his lips than from the south there came a heavy thudding sound that was like a thunder-clap in the distance, and a few seconds later, a great shell screamed immediately overhead, to send up a fountain of water several feet into the air, not more than forty yards from the "Dresden's" bows.

A loud cheer was lifted by the crew of the "Harlech"--the men who saw on a sudden, as if newly awakened from a nightmare, that deliverance was, indeed, at hand. For yonder, bearing straight in their direction, the tolling of the great guns echoing across the sea, were three ships of the British Navy, racing towards the enemy like as many joyful greyhounds loosed together from the leash.

They were indeed three greyhounds of the sea: the "Glasgow," the 27-knot cruiser that had escaped from the fatal fight off Coronel, when the "Monmouth" and the "Good Hope" went down before the weight of the German guns; the "Kent," which had run down and sunk the "Leipzig"; and the "Invincible," the splendid armoured cruiser--the first of its kind--whose twelve-inch guns had sent to the bottom the "Scharnhorst" and the "Gneisenau," to avenge the death of Cradock. These were ships that had been tempered in the stern forge of warfare, that had been tried and not found wanting; even then, they had come from a great victory in the south. As they swept down upon the foe, there was something in the outline of their dark and threatening hulls, in the very smoke that issued from their funnels, that made them appear, in very truth, invincible and ruthless.

One after the other, in quick succession, their great guns opened fire, until the sound was deafening, and it was as if the broad waters were alive. Everywhere were great living fountains in the sea, and around each one the water was churned white as snow.

The "Dresden," which was completed in the year 1907, had been built with the idea of speed, and was but lightly armed. She carried only ten four-inch guns

and two torpedo-tubes, and with these she could not hope to put up a fight against such a powerful adversary as the "Invincible." In an old, time-worn phrase, she questioned not the order of her going, but, putting her helm about, fled like a startled roe at very sight of those who had marked her down.

It is impossible to describe the feelings of the men on board the "Harlech." They had been rescued, at the eleventh hour, from the very jaws of death; and the sudden knowledge that they, at last, were safe, combined with a sense of relief that the living shells were no longer hooting and shrieking about their ears, had a singular effect not only on every member of the crew, but even upon Captain Crouch himself.

One and all, they worked at the pumps in a kind of frenzied joy, and as they worked, they cheered. It soon became manifest that the "Harlech" would be saved. She had been struck upon the water-line; the forward holds had filled; and had the sea been rough, there is no doubt she would have gone down with all hands on board. As it was, she shipped no water that the pumps were not able to eject. Even as the men worked, her bows rose, inch by inch, to their normal level above the surface of the sea.

The "Invincible" rushed past, and signalled to the "Harlech," asking if she needed help. Crouch, who was a fighting man by nature, knew well enough that the object of all war is to damage the enemy, and that it was a sound principle, both in practice and in theory, to let the wounded lie. The "Harlech" was wounded; she lay upon the water like a winged duck, for the time being crippled and quite useless. The main business of the British armoured cruiser was to overhaul and sink the "Dresden." If she stayed to give help to the merchant ship, if she slowed down and changed her course, the German would stand the better chance of escape. Captain Crouch, therefore, did not hesitate to send back the answer that he was well able to take care of himself; at the same time, he made so bold as to wish His Majesty's ships the very best of luck.

By then, the "Dresden" was almost out of sight, steaming due north-eastward, with the full power of her engines. As the chase continued, the English men-of-war became strung out, the "Invincible" and "Glasgow" leading, the "Kent" falling behind. In every hold the stokers were hard at work, shovelling with frantic energy more coal upon the furnaces, until the sky-line was black with long clouds of rolling smoke. Until the sun went down in a flood of red upon the western sky-line, and darkness spread slowly across the illimitable ocean, this headlong chase continued.

The "Dresden" held her own, keeping within long range of the great guns of the armoured cruiser. As they learnt afterwards, under cover of night, she turned south again, thus escaping from her pursuers. She had been designed as a commerce-destroyer, and, together with her sister-ship the "Emden," was well

suited to evade more powerful and heavily armoured ships. On this occasion, she got away in safety; but, a few weeks afterwards, she met with the inevitable fate that was in store for her, and hauled down her flag--so that the ensign of the German Navy vanished from the seas.

With matters of historical importance we are only secondarily concerned. The business of this narrative is with Jimmy Burke, and also, in a less degree, with Captain Crouch. Crouch had not spoken rashly when he signalled that the "Harlech" stood in no need of help. He had already satisfied himself that the vessel would remain afloat. Thanks to Providence, the damage she had sustained was nearly all above the water-line; and this was due very largely to the fact that the "Dresden" for the most part had fired shrapnel at decisive range.

This had been done with an object. The German captain desired nothing better than that the merchant ship should haul down her colours and surrender. She had--as he probably knew--a valuable cargo on board; and besides, the tons of coal she carried in her bunkers would be of infinite value to a ship to whom all coaling stations were closed by the extended pressure of the British Navy. Had the "Dresden" wished to sink the "Harlech," there is no doubt she could have done so straight away. As it was, in pursuance of the Prussian policy of frightfulness, it had been her object to terrorize the crew. Moreover, being in complete ignorance of the fact that the British cruisers were rapidly drawing down upon him, the captain of the "Dresden" had imagined that he had plenty of time upon his hands.

He very nearly paid the penalty of over-confidence. He escaped by the skin of his teeth, leaving the "Harlech" still floating, but a battered hulk.

All that night, Crouch and his men worked in desperation. On board the ship was a perfect hubbub of hammering, hastening to and fro and the giving of orders. Such holes in the ship's sides as were likely to prove dangerous, should the sea get up, were repaired in rough, eager haste; and not until then did Crouch give orders to clear away the debris of the superstructure from the main-deck and hatchways.

By daybreak the following morning, the ship--though still in a sorry plight--was pronounced seaworthy and well able to continue on her voyage. And by that time, also, by sheer chance alone, there had fallen into the hands of Jimmy Burke something of the most significant importance, upon which--as will afterwards appear--the whole thread of this narrative depends.

The boy had been set to work upon the forward well-deck, clearing away, by the light of a lantern, the pieces of shattered and twisted iron and broken woodwork that lay everywhere upon the riddled, splintered decks. On a sudden, he had come across a half sheet of note-paper, caught in the cogs of one of the winches and smeared with grease and oil.

Now, there is nothing remarkable in a half sheet of note-paper; and there is

small doubt that Jimmy would not have hesitated to throw it away at once, had he not remembered that he had seen this very paper before. It was the kind of paper that was used largely in the offices of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in New York. It was a blue paper, upon the top of which had been stamped the initials of the firm: R.&G.

It was a half sheet that had been torn carelessly, and which in consequence was wider at the top than at the bottom. Jimmy was positive that he had seen it in the sea-chest of Rudolf Stork. And therefore, instead of throwing it overboard, he put it furtively into one of the pockets of his coat, perfectly certain that, when Stork had thrown his papers away in such alarmed, suspicious haste, this single piece had been blown back upon the deck. It contained about five lines in a bold handwriting, rather large and sprawling; and Jimmy had a mind to read it as soon as a suitable opportunity occurred.

That did not happen till early the following afternoon, when he found himself alone in the forecastle, with half-an-hour to spare. He pulled out the sheet of paper from his pocket, and holding it to the porthole light made out the following mysterious and vague announcement--

> *Steamboat entrance verified. Evening navigate. Follow idea. Vernacular encumbrance. Enter into Guinea half-speed.*

He read it over and over again; and the more he read it, the more ridiculous and senseless did it seem. He could see no meaning in the words at all, or rather, the sentences appeared quite unconnected one with the other.

He read it so often that he very soon knew it word for word by heart. And throughout the remainder of that voyage, until the very evening when a great calamity befell them, he racked his brains continually to find some solution of the riddle.

The probability was that these strange words meant something. The handwriting, though unknown to him, was sufficiently angular in its characteristics to suggest that it belonged to a German; and that, together with the fact that Rudolf Stork was undoubtedly a German spy, was firm ground for suspicion. But, to discover--if such existed--some unknown and hidden meaning was no such easy matter.

# CHAPTER XI--The Middle Watch

Throughout the next few days Jimmy found himself in a veritable whirlpool of perplexity and doubt. He knew quite well what he ought to do, but could see no way of doing it. Hitherto, affairs had been going persistently against him.

In the first place, he knew that Rudolf Stork was a spy, and the man was probably on his way to England on some secret business not unconnected with the war. It was Stork who had broken open the cases of cargo in the after-hold, to find them filled with service rifles for the British army. Again, the man had given proof of his own guilt when, during the panic that ensued when the ship was believed to be sinking, he had cast the contents of his sea-chest overboard. That the papers in question had been of an incriminating nature could not be doubted; the strange message, written upon a half sheet of note-paper, was probably in some code which could be deciphered easily enough at the Headquarters of the German Secret Service in Berlin. It was even possible that Stork had managed to convey the intelligence to the "Dresden" that the "Harlech" was carrying contraband goods in the shape of munitions of war. They had been saved at the eleventh hour; but there was no certain guarantee that Stork--if he was really guilty of such treachery--might not attempt to betray the ship again to enemy submarines, as soon as they had gained English waters.

On board the whole ship, Jimmy alone was conscious of the danger in which they stood. Stork, by the depth of his perfidy and his outrageous cunning, had managed to put Captain Crouch upon a false scent, by levelling an accusation at the only person who was fully aware of his own guilt.

Jimmy knew all this, and thought it out, time and again, during the long watches of the night; and in the end, he determined to interview Captain Crouch, to see if the little sea-captain could be persuaded to listen to his story even for a few minutes.

With this object in view, Jimmy waited an opportunity which did not present itself for some time. In the first place, the captain was seldom alone, and Jimmy--by Crouch's orders--was never allowed to work by himself. It was not until they were nearing the south coast of Ireland, and Crouch was growing anxious in regard to prowling submarines from Kiel and Wilhelmshaven, that the boy was able to seize his chance.

It was during the middle watch at night, and Jimmy, who had not been to sleep, saw a light suddenly appear in the captain's cabin. At the same time, the aquiline and birdlike features of Captain Crouch were silhouetted against one of the portholes that looked out upon the forecastle and the forward well-deck.

Jimmy slipped from his bunk, crossed the well-deck, and reached the main-deck by way of the companion-ladder.

He found the door of the captain's cabin ajar, and looking in, saw Crouch bending over a chart. The atmosphere of the room was thick with the smoke of Bull's Eye Shag, and the extraordinary pungent odour of this strange tobacco was wafted along the deck.

It was as much as Jimmy could do to summon sufficient courage to knock; and when, at last, he did so, the sound of the captain's gruff voice, which was not unlike the sharp bark of a dog, caused him visibly to start.

"Come in," said Crouch. "Come in."

Jimmy, recognizing that he was about to take the bull by the horns, screwed up all his courage, took in a deep breath, and entered the room.

The moment he set eyes upon the boy, Crouch set his brows in a frown.

"You!" he exclaimed. "I thought I gave definite orders that on no account were you to attempt to see me."

Jimmy, who had intended to maintain a bold front throughout the interview, found all his resolution vanish before the single piercing eye of Captain Crouch. He took another step forward, and brought both his hands together with the gesture of one who begs for mercy.

"Please, hear me, sir," he pleaded. "I have something of the utmost importance to tell you. I declare that I will speak nothing but the truth."

"Do you mean," said Crouch, "that you have come at this hour of the night to confess that you are a German spy?"

"I mean nothing of the sort, sir. I am innocent."

Crouch turned upon his heel with a gesture of impatience.

"You mean to lie," said he; "you mean to lie to the end. You belong to a breed of liars."

"I come of English blood, sir," answered Jimmy. "My family has a good name."

The boy was going on to speak of "Swiftsure Burke," and the Admiral's gallant deeds, when Crouch took him up in a voice of thunder that must have been

audible to the officer on watch upon the bridge.

"I care nothing for your pedigree," said he; "for ought I know you may be descended from Peter the Hermit. If you've got the good name you say, you can clear it in a public court, as soon as ever you are set ashore in England."

"Sir," said Jimmy, "the clearing of my good name will not help to save your ship."

Crouch looked up.

"What d'ye mean?" he asked.

"I mean, sir, that I am innocent, as I have said, but there is one on board this ship who is, in truth, a spy."

"Who?" asked the captain.

"The ship's carpenter," said Jimmy.

"Rudolf Stork?"

"The same, sir; the man who accused me falsely."

Crouch shook his head.

"You ask me to take your word against his? Why should I do so? There's a plain question as from one man to another--though you're nothing more than a boy. If I believe him, I take the word of a man who came to me with a good character, who has done his work well since he has been aboard. If I believe you, I put my trust in one against whom the evidence is overwhelming, who slunk on board this ship like a thief in the night. No, my lad; I'm a plain man, and, I hope, a fair one. I've a good share of common sense. I want to do the right thing, as any God-fearing man should do; but, I've formed my opinion of you, and I'm not disposed to alter it. One thing, and one thing only, is in your favour. The other day, when the ship was in danger, when we were under fire from that pirate's guns, I noticed that you behaved yourself like a man. When the shrapnel shells were bursting in the rigging, you were the last hand to leave the pumps. I saw that myself, and I'm grateful. But it's not proof, mind you. You're a plucky lad, sure enough, else you'd never have taken on the job you're doing now. I give credit where credit's due; but, the fact that you have a certain amount of courage goes rather to prove, than to disprove, that you are a German spy."

The captain paused, knocked out his pipe upon the toe of his cork foot into a large spittoon that stood upon the floor, and then gave vent to a grunt which might have signified either satisfaction or disapproval.

Jimmy saw that there was nothing left to him but to produce such evidence as was afforded by the strange message upon the half sheet of note-paper. With trembling hands, he drew this from his pocket, and held it towards Captain Crouch.

"I found that," said he.

He had meant to say much more, but a sense of injured innocence and in-

dignation, and a full realization of his own helplessness, made it difficult for him to control his voice.

Crouch looked at the paper, turning it over several times in his hand, and then read it aloud.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"It belonged to Stork, sir," muttered Jimmy.

"And what of that, my boy? What does it mean?"

"I can't say, sir," stammered Jimmy. "I thought that, perhaps, you might be able to explain. It has some hidden meaning. I know that Stork is a German spy."

Crouch crumpled the paper in his hand and hurled it across the cabin in a fit of impatience. "Hidden meaning to Jericho!" he roared. "Go to a younger man than me, and one who knows less of the world, with an old wives' tale like that. This is so much gibberish, written by an idle sailor who thought to ape the scholar, when he had been better employed sail-making or splicing ropes. Go back to bed, my lad, and worry me no longer. I hold fast to my resolve; you shall be tried for your life in Portsmouth by a proper legal court, and if you can't give a satisfactory account of yourself, as sure as a typhoon in August in the China Seas, you'll swing for a German spy."

Without a word, poor Jimmy Burke left the captain's cabin, more heartbroken and despondent than he had ever been before. Captain Crouch, for all his virtues--and these, as we are soon to learn, were many--was a hard man by nature, and, moreover, one who was as obstinate and pertinacious as any rough and weather-beaten mariner can be.

# CHAPTER XII--The U93

During the latter part of her voyage, the "Harlech" was not able to travel faster than eight knots an hour, whereas normally she was capable of doing as much as thirteen under favourable conditions. The truth was her engines had been badly damaged by shell fire; and had she not been commanded by a man of inflexible resolution, there is no doubt she would have put into one of the Irish ports for safety and repairs. Crouch, however, had his orders, and these were to take the ship to Portsmouth, with as little delay as possible and in face of every risk; and

thither he was determined to go.

It was not until the evening upon which they sighted the Fastnet light that Crouch himself, for the first time, had some cause for suspicion in regard to Rudolf Stork. The man's conduct on that particular occasion was by no means easy to explain.

During the incident with the "Dresden" two of the ship's quartermasters had been severely wounded and rendered incapable of carrying on their work. On ocean liners and merchant vessels the quartermasters are entrusted with a very important office: it is they who take their turn, watch by watch, at the wheel, who are responsible that the ship maintains her course. There were now but two quartermasters capable of doing duty; and Captain Crouch had to look about him to find other men capable of taking the places of those who had been disabled.

It so happened that Rudolf Stork was one of the first to volunteer, and was able to prove that he had sufficient knowledge of a ship's compass to take charge of the wheel. He was told off for the middle watch, which was that commanded by the chief officer, Mr. Dawes.

Having picked up the famous Fastnet light, and verified his course, which was almost due south-east to the Scillies, Captain Crouch turned in at midnight, at the end of his own watch, and handed over to Dawes, who ascended the bridge steps followed by Stork. The night was bitterly cold; a fine rain was driving south-westward, down the St. George's Channel. There was also a sea fog which completely obliterated the moon and stars. Both Dawes and the acting quartermaster wore waterproof coats and sou'westers.

Now, it so happened that on this occasion the chief officer was very far from well. A few days before, he had contracted a violent cough which that night showed signs of becoming serious. He had reported to the captain that he felt indisposed, but protested that he was quite able to do his duty. For all that, he had not been upon the bridge three-quarters of an hour when he was seized with an immoderate fit of coughing. This coughing was not only a serious impediment to the proper carrying out of his duty, but it was also exceedingly painful. His pulse was exceptionally fast, and a certain hot dryness of the skin was a sure symptom of fever. Indeed, had there been a doctor on board, he would have diagnosed the case at once, and pronounced the chief officer to be on the verge of double pneumonia, aggravated by bronchial trouble. In face of this, it speaks volumes for the pluck and perseverance of Mr. Dawes that he had undertaken to go on watch at all.

Very soon, however, the coughing became so violent and persistent that he was, at last, obliged to leave the bridge, to go below to his cabin. He was not absent much longer than ten minutes; but, it so happened that, whilst he was away, Crouch, who had not yet been to sleep, returned to the bridge.

The captain did not ascend the steps that led from the main-deck, but came upon the wheel from the after side, by way of the boat-deck, which had been much shattered by the shell fire of the "Dresden." Crouch--as is well known--had the eye of a lynx; and he saw at once that Stork was holding the ship on a course at least twenty-five degrees south of that marked upon the captain's chart.

"Hullo there!" he shouted, so suddenly that Stork started and let out an exclamation of surprise.

The man was obviously alarmed, and for a moment lost his self-possession, but recovered himself in an instant, and put the ship about upon her proper course.

"Look here," said Crouch, "I'll have no monkey tricks on board this packet. What d'ye mean? Answer me that! What d'ye mean?"

Stork made some feeble excuse, to which Crouch listened in stony silence. When Mr. Dawes returned to the bridge, he found his captain in none of the best of tempers. Neither was Crouch much inclined to be sympathetic in regard to the chief officer's hacking cough.

"You're ill, man," said he; "of course, you're ill. I know that as well as you; and as I told you before, you were in no fit state to come on duty. Still, if you undertake a job of work, I expect you to do it; and it is not for me to tell you a ship's officer's duty. As long as you hold the bridge, you remain there. Understand this, Mr. Dawes: there's a mighty difference between a ship crossing the Atlantic in time of war, with such a cargo as we shipped in New York harbour, and an oil-tank steamer in the south Pacific, when the captain and the mate can play halfpenny nap all day and sleep like infants half the night. If you're not fit for duty, go below, sir, and leave the bridge to me. It won't be the first time in my life I've done eight hours on end."

Mr. Dawes took the hint, which, indeed, he was hardly in a condition to reject. He went below, still coughing and more than a little ashamed.

As for Crouch, he remained on duty until eight bells had sounded, which--as the conclusion of the middle watch--is four o'clock in the morning. Throughout that time, he kept the eye of a hawk upon the man at the wheel, who, in his turn, never once looked up from the compass.

All this while, Crouch's brain was active. He may have been inclined to be pig-headed, but he was by no means a fool. For the first time, he found himself wondering whether there was any truth in what Jimmy had told him. He was perfectly convinced that Stork had changed the course of the ship on purpose. The man was not only quite thorough in his work as a rule, but understood his duty, and was hardly likely to have made so serious a mistake through negligence alone.

When the last watch came to deck, the captain's eyes followed Stork as he made his way to the forecastle; and then he, too, went below to his cabin, to snatch

a few hours' sleep. He was now quite ready to admit the possibility that he had made a serious mistake, and made up his mind to keep a sharp eye upon Stork throughout the remainder of the voyage.

The next day--when the "Harlech" was steadily ploughing her way, heading for the entrance of the Channel--was an anxious time for Crouch. He knew the full value of the cargo he carried, and its utmost importance to those to whom it was consigned; and he knew also that, at any moment, a torpedo from some lurking, hidden foe might send the ship and all on board to the bottom. A heavy sea fog lay upon the surface of the water. Dawes was in bed, unable to rise; and since the third officer was somewhat young and inexperienced, nearly all the responsible work of the ship devolved upon the captain.

That afternoon, towards sunset, the fog lifted a trifle. Crouch remained upon the bridge, straining his single eye through his long telescope for minutes at a time. Presently, he closed the instrument with a snap, tucked it under his arm, and dived both hands into his trousers pockets.

"Just as I thought!" he exclaimed. "We're a good six points to the south, and on the wrong side of the Scillies. That man's a rogue."

There was no one to hear this remark but the quartermaster at the wheel, and Jimmy Burke, who had just then ascended the bridge steps with a cup of bovril for the captain, who had sent below for something to warm him up.

"My boy," said Crouch, "I may have done you a wrong. Mind, I don't say I have; but, I'm quite ready to confess that there's a chance of it. Come and see me in my cabin, at ten o'clock to-night."

During that evening and the early hours of the night, the "Harlech" rounded the Scilly Islands, and sighted the Cornish coast, where the great, powerful light at the Lizard flashes its message of warning across eighty miles of sea.

Jimmy Burke, filled with anticipation concerning his coming interview with the captain, did not turn into the forecastle, but betook himself to the poop, where he lay down upon a great coil of rope.

Now, those who know anything of the hardships of a sea-faring life are well aware that a coil of rope makes a couch that is far from being uncomfortable--as things go with those whose fate it is to serve before the mast. There is always a great depression in the middle, in which it is possible for the body to sink; and this is exactly what happened to Jimmy Burke. He sank so deeply in the midst of the coils of rope that, in spite of the fact that it was an exceedingly bright moonlit night, his form was completely hidden from any one who might happen to be passing.

He did not fall asleep, because he was particularly anxious to count each sounding of the ship's bells, knowing that at four bells precisely he would have to report himself to Captain Crouch. He was therefore in full possession of his senses

and wide awake when a shadowy form ascended the poop steps, and passed to the taffrails at the very stern of the vessel, from which was suspended the rope of the ship's log.

This man Jimmy recognized at once as Rudolf Stork. Even in that light, there was no mistaking his broad, sloping shoulders and his slovenly gait. Stork carried something in his hand; and at first the boy was not able to make out what this was. He was not left long in doubt, however; for, when Stork raised it to the level of the taffrails and began to move up and down a small lever which made a persistent, irregular tapping sound, it became manifest that the man was in possession of a signalling lamp, with which he was sending messages to some unknown point in the darkness that was spread upon the sea.

Jimmy Burke was like one transfixed. He remained motionless and breathless, amazed at the man's audacity. And before he had time to put two and two together, to realize the full import of what was happening, four bells sounded from the forward part of the ship. It was ten o'clock; Jimmy was expected in the captain's cabin.

Swiftly and silently, the boy got to his feet. As he did so, fearing that his presence might be discovered, he kept an eye upon Stork, whose back was turned to him, whose attention was fully occupied with the work he had in hand. On the surface of the water, in the white wake of the ship, Jimmy could see the reflection of the signalling lamp that flashed and flickered with the dots and dashes of the Morse code, as if, in its own poor way, it strove to imitate the magnificent lighthouse that lay but a few miles to the north.

And then, on a sudden, from out of the darkness, like an evil eye in the night, there appeared an answering light--small, far away, and yet marvellously distinct.

[image]

*LIKE AN EVIL EYE IN THE NIGHT THERE APPEARED AN ANSWERING LIGHT.*

Jimmy drew back in horror. For all that, he remained sufficiently master of himself to keep absolutely silent. Without a sound, he glided down the companion-ladder to the well-deck, reached the main-deck, and burst into the captain's cabin.

He had not troubled to knock; and his abrupt entrance caused Crouch to look up from a volume of sailing instructions he had been in the act of reading.

"My lad," said he, "we're not over particular here in regard to manners; but, it's customary to ask permission to enter the captain's cabin."

Then he saw that the boy's face was ashen white, and shaped his lips as if about to whistle.

"What's up?" said he. "What's up?"

"For mercy's sake," cried Jimmy, "come with me! That villain is signalling from the poop to a German submarine."

Crouch straightened like a man struck. For fully a minute, he stared at Jimmy in amazement. There was that in the expression of the boy's face that left no room for doubt. No one--and Captain Crouch less than any one--could fail to see that he had spoken what he honestly believed to be the truth.

"A German submarine!" repeated Crouch.

"What else could it be?" cried Jimmy. "No cruiser, gunboat or destroyer would dare to show up so far from home. It's a submarine, sir, sure enough. And the rascal's signalling with a shuttered lantern in the Morse code, and they have answered back."

Crouch moved quickly to the doorway, and then, coming back into the room, flung open a drawer in his writing-desk, and took out a small, nickel-plated revolver that glittered in the lamplight.

"We'll put a stop to this," he cried. "It may not be too late to save the ship." Followed by the boy, he dashed out upon the deck.

There are scenes in the lives of us all which impress us so vividly at the time that we carry them with us always in our memory, as clearly and as permanently as an impression can be made upon a photographic plate.

Jimmy Burke will never forget the moonlit scene that was presented to his view from the doorway of Captain Crouch's cabin, that was at once beautiful and terrible. On the starboard side of the ship the rocks of Cornwall arose from out of the sea in a long, dark, rugged line, in the centre of which the Lizard light flashed like a brilliant star. A full moon hung low in the heavens, tracing a broad, silvery pathway across the broken surface of the sea. The "Harlech" was moving cumbrously through the water, on a course almost due east, when, on a sudden, in the full light of the moon, there rose out of the water, like some hideous monster of the under-sea, the periscope and conning-tower of an enormous submarine, upon the side of which was just discernible the ominous and dreaded letters--U93.

# CHAPTER XIII--To the Boats!

Even in broad daylight there is something about a submarine that is uncanny. The capacity to float half-submerged, the peculiar shape and the dull slatey colour of this latest triumph of naval science, remind one of some weird antediluvian animal--one of those strange, gigantic monsters that are known to have inhabited the world long before man made his appearance. On this fateful night the bright moonshine, scintillating on the broken surface of the water, made the German submarine seem ghost-like and supernatural. Its sudden and unexpected appearance had the effect upon Jimmy Burke of a douche of ice-cold water. For several seconds he remained standing quite motionless and breathless, staring in stupefied amazement at the dark outline of the enemy.

Crouch, on the other hand, wasted not as much as the fraction of a second. A man who has spent a great part of his life in shooting wild and savage beasts is not easily taken by surprise. He was used to shocks. He saw at once that the peril in which the "Harlech" stood was both extreme and immediate. At such a moment it was not his business to ask himself why this calamity had come to pass. He was concerned only with the ship that he commanded, which it was his duty to save at every cost.

As quick as thought he turned, and dashing up the bridge steps, thrust the quartermaster aside and seized the spokes of the wheel.

The "Harlech" was travelling at full speed ahead--that is to say, she was making a poor seven knots an hour. The U93 lay on the starboard quarter; and Crouch, without a moment's hesitation, put the helm hard aport, with the result that the bows of the ship swung round on an angle of forty-five degrees, until she was heading straight for the submarine.

The moment was one of such intense excitement that Jimmy could think of nothing else but the extreme danger in which he found himself; he had forgotten completely all about Rudolf Stork. Crouch had sent below the quartermaster on duty, with orders for the boatswain to summon the crew; and in less than a minute every one--with the exception of those who were at work in the engine-room and stokeholds--was on deck.

The members of the crew crowded along the taffrails on the starboard side of the ship, where they shouted to one another and pointed excitedly in the direction of the submarine. Jimmy found himself in the midst of a crowd of half-clad, panic-stricken men, who jostled one another, and whose voices were inarticulate and hoarse. It is a significant fact that these men, who had sustained unflinchingly the fire of the "Dresden's" guns, who had behaved like heroes throughout, were now as senseless and as frightened as a flock of sheep in a field with a savage dog. The reason of this is not so far to seek: the submarine is not only as deadly a weapon as has ever been contrived, but, so far, no adequate means have been invented to counteract its subtle powers of aggression. Submarine is useless against submarine; destroyers are not able to account for under-water craft without having luck on their side--an auxiliary to warfare that is seldom absent, and yet which can hardly be relied upon. Neither are wire nets wholly adequate, since these can be utilized with effect only in certain localities where the seas are narrow and not deep.

None the less, though the crew of the "Harlech" were excited and apprehensive, they could not fail to see that it was Crouch's object to run the submarine down. One and all, they had supreme confidence in Crouch, and knew--now that the captain himself was at the wheel---that their lives could not be entrusted to safer hands.

They heard the tinkling of the engine-room bell when Crouch rang down to tell the chief engineer to let her go. The captain's teeth were set; he held the wheel at arm's length in an attitude of tension, his one eye staring straight before him, over the peak of the vessel, to the point where the U93 lay upon the surface of the water, her conning-tower and superstructure showing like the back of a whale.

It seemed at first that they would succeed, that the submarine would be rammed, cut in half and sent to the bottom like a stone. There could not have been fifty feet between the bows of the "Harlech" and her little venomous enemy when the U93 began to move, gaining almost at once sufficient velocity to cause the water to part about her forward ventilators in a long feathery wave, arrow-shaped and snow-white in the moonshine.

For ten minutes the chase continued; and those were moments of breathless and intense excitement. Once, at least, a torpedo was fired, which missed the ship by a matter of yards, passing on the port side, leaving a trail in the moonlight that was like the sheen on the scales of a fish. It caused each man on board who saw it firstly to shudder, and secondly to lift a silent prayer of thanksgiving to the great God above.

Had Crouch not turned the ship head-on to the submarine, had the "Harlech" presented a broadside target, there is small doubt the torpedo would have found its mark, and all on board would have perished. Afterwards, no one

was able to testify that more than a single torpedo had been fired.

It now became clear that the submarine commander had decided to gain his ends by swift manoeuvring. Crouch himself was the first to recognize that the "Harlech" stood no chance of overhauling its enemy. The U93 could apparently travel on the surface at the rate of not less than fifteen knots; and even had the "Harlech" not been so sadly disabled, she could hardly have overtaken her quarry.

The submarine drew away some distance ahead, and then made a half circle to the left, returning on a parallel course, until she was level with the steamer. The "Harlech" was then not more than a mile away from the Cornish coast, where the dark, rugged outline of the hills was clearly visible in the moonlight.

Suddenly the hatch in the conning-tower of the U93 was seen to open, and two men made their appearance, one of whom shouted through a megaphone. He spoke good English. In the stillness of the night every word he said was audible.

"Ahoy, there!" he cried. "Slow down at once, and stop; or we send you to the bottom."

"Who are you?" asked Crouch, more with the idea of wasting time than of gleaning any definite information.

"His Imperial Majesty's submarine U93," came the answer. "Heave to, at once!"

Crouch saw that he had no alternative but to surrender. The "Harlech" was now broadside on to the submarine, which was not a hundred and fifty yards away. A torpedo, if discharged, could no more fail to strike its target than send the merchant ship to the bottom in the space of a few moments. It was a bitter pill to swallow; and as he paced to and fro upon the bridge, the little wizened master-mariner thought of Jason, Junior, sitting in his spacious offices in the midst of the hurry and commotion of New York.

He looked again at the submarine, which had now turned round and was following its victim as a cat plays with a mouse--except that, in this case, the mouse was huge and cumbrous, the cat quite small and fragile. In something that was very like a fit of rage Crouch grasped the handle of the telegraph, and rang down to the engine-room to "Stop."

The submarine drew even closer, until at last the German commander was able to make himself heard without the use of his megaphone.

"Are you the 'Harlech'?" he demanded.

"How do you know that?" said Crouch.

This seemed to anger the German, for he shouted even louder than before.

"I am not here to answer questions, but to ask them. Please understand that I am master of the situation: I have but to give the order, and a torpedo puts an end to you all."

"Do what you like," said Crouch. "We've no means of self-defence, as you

can see."

"You have contraband goods on board," said the other.

"That may, or may not, be."

The German laughed.

"I know it," said he. "And now, I give you fair warning: you and your men have precisely five minutes in which to leave the ship. If you are not gone by the end of that time, you will pay the penalty of death, for the ship goes to the bottom."

Captain Crouch knit his brows in a frown. This was the first time in the life of the little man that he had met with anything in the shape of failure. As we have already pointed out, he was one who had made a success of most things. He had risen from extreme poverty and small beginnings to be a man of note--one whose name was well known in the four quarters of the globe. Just now, he felt as if he would never be able to hold up his head again, to look in the face the old friends who had followed him through thick and thin, who had always thought so highly of their leader.

Still, if he felt all this, he showed it neither in the expression of his face nor in the tones of his voice. In much the same manner as he would have given an everyday and simple order, he raised a hand to his mouth, and shouted at the full power of his lungs--

"All hands to the boats!"

# CHAPTER XIV--The Doomed Ship

"All hands to the boats!"

There was no need for the order to be repeated a second time. The men, who knew quite well what was coming, were only waiting for the word. Indeed, in one part of the ship, the captain's orders had been anticipated by no less a person than Rudolf Stork.

There is little doubt that--had the submarine not appeared when it did--the days of Rudolf Stork had been numbered, then and there. Had Captain Crouch

found Stork upon the poop, signalling to the enemy, he would have shot him like a dog, without a moment's hesitation. But, during the brief space of time whilst Jimmy was in the captain's cabin, the submarine had drawn quite close to the "Harlech"; and in the immediate presence of this new and more certain peril Crouch--and Jimmy also--forgot all about the ship's carpenter who had betrayed all on board.

There is every reason to suppose that Stork knew well enough the plans of the German commander. Possibly, he had known all along that the "Harlech" was doomed. He understood that the so-called submarine blockade was to be carried out with ruthless energy and perseverance, and that the lives of neutrals, even of women and children, were not likely to be held of much account.

He was therefore in the greater haste to get quit of the ship; and for this his position on the poop--the stern part of the vessel--offered him an opportunity which he was not likely to refuse.

Hoisted alongside the demolished round-house, where most of the ship's stores were kept, was a small gig, not much larger than a dinghy, used as a rule for harbour work. It so happened that when all hands were called on deck by the shrill note of the boatswain's whistle, the cook and the cook's mate had hastened from the galley to the poop; and it was these two men that Stork summoned to his assistance.

Without much difficulty, they lowered the dinghy, and had even launched it in the water, before Crouch had given the order for the boats to be manned. To lower a rope was the work of a minute; and before any one was aware that the ship's carpenter had left the ship, Stork and the two cooks were rowing frantically for the shore. There was no question but that they would reach the coast in safety. The dinghy was quite seaworthy; the damage done to the ship's boats during the bombardment from the "Dresden" had been repaired upon the voyage. The night was clear, the sea perfectly calm, and the shore--as we have said--not far away.

In the meantime, the German commander continued to issue his orders. Crouch still remained upon the bridge.

"Lower a gangway!" cried the German.

"A gangway!" echoed Crouch in open derision. "Do you think that we're a pack of school-girls that can't swarm down a rope? For why should we want a gangway?"

For some reason or other this seemed to infuriate the German.

"Do as you are told," he roared; "and don't argue the point with me. Lower a gangway at once. Do you imagine I intend to waste one of our finest Krupp torpedoes on a cargo ship of not five thousand tons! No, sir, we are not such fools in Germany. As soon as you and your crew are off, it will be short work, with such a cargo as you carry, to send her sky high with a bomb."

Crouch said nothing more, but came down from the bridge like a beaten man. It was when he gained the main-deck that he remembered Rudolf Stork, and went aft, with a set look upon his face and a loaded revolver in his hand.

When he reached the poop, he was furious when he saw what had happened. Not only was the dinghy gone, but the rope--by means of which Stork and the two cooks had managed to escape--was dangling at the ship's side.

"The rascal!" Crouch hissed between his teeth. Then, thrusting his revolver into a coat pocket, he clenched his fist, and shook it at the stars.

"If ever I get the chance," he muttered, "I'll be even with that rogue. I've been a blind fool, all along."

He returned to the main-deck, and supervised the lowering of the boats, in which there was ample accommodation for the crew. This work was carried out in the utmost haste; all on board knew well enough that the submarine commander would hold to his word, that they had five minutes--and not a second longer--in which to make good their escape.

Still, there was not much time to spare when the four boats were rowed round to the foot of the gangway steps, down which filed the crew, the ship's officers and engineers, each one with a bundle under his arm, in which he carried his most prized possessions.

Grim resolution, smothered anger, and deep sullen dejection--these were the sentiments that were imprinted on the face of every man. They were helpless, and they knew it. The German had spoken truly; the submarine, fragile, slender and evil-looking, was the absolute master of the situation. The will of the submarine commander was the law, immutable and rigid. They had no option but to obey, without question and in haste.

Crouch remained on deck until--as he thought--every man had descended to the boats. Then he himself took his place on the stern seat of the last boat to leave the ship. One after the other, they rowed away in the darkness, the rhythmic plashing of the oars growing fainter and fainter in the distance, and seeming to strike upon the silence of the night a note of sadness that was not out of keeping with the scene: the gentle moonshine on the water, the distant, rugged hills, and the ship--forsaken, listless, doomed. Some such thought may have entered into the mind of the German officer himself, standing on the conning-tower of the boat that he commanded, miles away from the Fatherland he loved and the lighted cafés of Berlin.

However that may be, he had evidently no intention of failing in what he conceived to be his duty. The submarine drew slowly alongside the gangway steps. The commander ascended to the main-deck, followed by a seaman who carried in his hand a great egg-shaped thing, from the top of which protruded the head of a fuse. It was a bomb, timed to explode precisely two minutes after the

lighting of the fuse. Of a certainty, the "Harlech," of the house of Jason, Stileman and May, was doomed, sentenced to be destroyed.

None the less, the German officer was in no haste. Leaving the sailor at the head of the companion-ladder, he entered the captain's cabin, overhauled the ship's papers, and even helped himself to a box of cigars which had been given to Crouch by Mr. Jason, Junior, on the day he left New York.

At the very moment this was happening, Captain Crouch himself, holding the tiller ropes in his hands, sat in the stern seat of the last boat like a man who is in a dream. Stern and hard as he was, accustomed to rule both circumstance and men by sheer force of will, he found this great calamity by no means easy to bear. It was no simple matter to realize the full extent of what had happened. He had been specially chosen to carry out a difficult and dangerous mission; and he had failed. It was not in his nature to think of what excuse he should make; he was prepared to take the blame. He knew now that he had made an irreparable mistake, that he had been deceived. And that brought back his mind to Rudolf Stork.

From Stork his thoughts turned naturally to Jimmy Burke; and then it was that he remembered, with the suddenness of an electric shock, that he had not seen the boy go on board any one of the boats. He thought it over quickly. Jimmy could not be in the dinghy, for he had caught sight of the boy on the main-deck after the dinghy had been launched. He was also equally certain that Jimmy had not descended the gangway when the crew manned the boats.

For once in his life--probably the only time on record--Captain Crouch was alarmed. He knew now that he had wronged the stowaway, and in the deep dejection of the moment was inclined to be unjust to himself, forgetting that, from the first, the circumstantial evidence had been all against the boy.

As he sat silent, motionless and downcast, he turned, and looked back at the dark outline of the forsaken, stricken ship. And little did he dream of the deed of unexampled heroism, of the scene of such vital and dramatic interest that even then was being enacted on board.

As the German officer tested Crouch's best cigars, lifting one after the other to his ear to see that they were dry, a face appeared at the porthole on the port side of the ship. It was the face of Jimmy Burke--a white, scared face, upon which, however, was the cast of resolution.

The German went out on to the main-deck on the starboard side, where he took the bomb from the sailor's hands. Thence he passed down the companion-ladder, along the alley-way to the engine-room, where he descended the trellised stairway, step by step.

On the floor of the engine-room, in the very base of the ship, he deposited his bomb, and then, stooping, struck a match and lit the end of the fuse.

At that, he ran up the steps, dashed out upon the forward well-deck, and hastened down the gangway. And at the very moment he set foot on board his submarine, Jimmy Burke appeared suddenly in the alley-way, from the direction of the engineers' mess-room, where he had been hiding. Thence, he ran to the engine-room, and at the top of the steps paused a moment to look down.

In the midst of the vast machinery, now idle and seemingly inert, but still droning from the effect of compressed, wasted steam, upon the black, oily floor, lay the egg-shaped German bomb. A little spurt of blue smoke was issuing in coils from the burning fuse, of which not more than two inches now remained.

With a loud cry that he was not able to suppress, the boy dashed down the stairs.

# CHAPTER XV--The Penitence of Captain Crouch

It can scarcely be denied that danger, and even death itself, are more terrible from a distance than when they actually stare us in the face. The truth is that, in moments of intense nervous strain, there is little time for the imagination to run riot; and--as the greatest of all poets has told us--it is imagination, more than anything else, that causes fear and panic. A time of emergency is a time for action, when it is better to do than to think. And always is it wiser and more manful to strive for success than to pause to consider, even for a single instant, the possibilities of failure.

Jimmy Burke, as he hastened down the engine-room steps, was concerned with one thing only: to reach the bomb before it was timed to explode. Had he waited to consider what would happen should he be too late, it is more than probable that he would have failed; he would never have lived to tell the tale. As it was, breathless and expectant, with a cold perspiration broken out upon his forehead, and his heart thumping violently against his ribs, he reached the infernal machine in the very nick of time. Seizing the burning end of the fuse between a thumb and finger, he crushed it out: and thus was the "Harlech" saved.

None the less, to make doubly sure of success, he carried the bomb up the staircase to the alley-way, where he threw it down an ash-shoot into the sea.

In the meantime Captain Crouch, seated on the stern seat of the last boat to leave the ship, found himself--as the saying goes--between the hammer and the anvil, between Scylla and Charybdis. He was anxious to make amends for the fatal mistake that he had made; to save, if possible, the life of the boy who was still upon the ship. And on that account, he found himself in something of a dilemma.

If he put back to the "Harlech," he imperilled the lives of every man in the boat; and he felt some doubt as to whether he was justified in doing that. He thought over the matter quickly, and then resolved to speak the truth.

"My lads," said he to his men, "all the voyage through I've done a great injustice to that boy of ours. He was a stowaway, right enough, but as loyal as I am. Even to-night, he did his utmost to warn me of danger ahead--he played the part of a man. Now, I ask you a fair question, and I want a straight answer, such as a sailor has a right to expect. For some reason or other, the boy has been left behind; and the ship--as you know--is doomed. She may have another minute to live; but the chances are that in a few seconds she'll be sent sky-high, blown to smithereens. Now, here's the point: are we to go back, and try to save the lad, or shall we row ahead for the shore? Yes, or no? There's no betwixt and between in a matter such as this."

The men in the boat did not take long to make up their minds. They were all British born--men whose forbears for generation after generation had earned their bread upon the sea. And nowhere else is the spirit of self-sacrifice and honest heroism more dearly fostered, nowhere else is a finer school for courage, than upon the broad waters of the ocean where young and old, from the forecastle to the galley, from the North Sea trawler to the Atlantic liner, take their fortunes in their hands and run the danger of their lives amid the wild typhoons of the southern seas, the blizzards of the Horn, and the icebergs of the Arctic. As one man, they offered to return to the stricken ship, to endeavour to save the stowaway.

Turning the boat round, they rowed in desperation, for their own lives also were at stake. The moonlight now seemed brighter than before; the few clouds had shifted; a light wind had sprung up from the west which formed endless ripples upon the surface of the sea, that glistened everywhere like myriads of spangles.

They could see the dark hull of the doomed ship, looming large against the sky-line. She lay there in the midst of the night, helpless and silent, like the great carcase of some stranded mammoth beast. And though these men rowed in a kind of frenzy, straining every nerve and muscle to the utmost, there was little hope in their hearts.

By now, the submarine had drawn away from the "Harlech." Lying upon the surface of the water, she was like a spider that watches its prey from the centre of

its web. The hatch of her conning-tower was closed. The "Harlech," the U93 and the boat in which was Captain Crouch, stood to one another in the relation of the corners of an equilateral triangle. Waves were breaking against the superstructure of the submarine--waves that were white as silver in the bright light of the moon.

Suddenly, Crouch let out a cry, and pointed excitedly towards the east.

"Look there!" he shouted. "A destroyer!"

Every man turned his eyes in the direction indicated; and there, sure enough, standing out upon the sky-line, clearly silhouetted and looking like the teeth of a broken comb, were the four funnels of a torpedo-boat-destroyer, from which proceeded a long, black trail of smoke that lay low and almost parallel to the surface of the sea.

The destroyer rushed through the water as an arrow comes singing through the air. Even as they looked, she grew larger and more distinct; until, presently, they could hear the throbbing of her engines and see the churned water lashed by the revolutions of her screws.

The U93 dived like a startled duck. In a few seconds she was gone.

The destroyer, which was originally heading straight for the "Harlech," now changed her course, and began to move round in circles, steaming at topmost speed, in her movements for all the world like a joyful dog on a lawn.

When the ship's boat was not more than a hundred yards from the "Harlech," the destroyer drew to within speaking distance, and the lieutenant-commander upon the bridge shouted to Captain Crouch.

"Have you seen the U93?" he asked.

"Seen her!" cried Crouch. "Why, she's not a cable's length from where you are. We have been turned out of our berths, and given five minutes in which to leave the ship; and there's a bomb on board which should have exploded before now."

At that, the British commander appeared vastly excited, raising his voice even louder.

"Then, man alive, keep your distance!" he bellowed. "If the explosion takes place, that boat of yours is as likely as not to be scuttled by a falling spar. You're heading the wrong way, man! Put about, get your distance, and stand clear while the trouble's on."

[image]

*"YOU'RE HEADING THE WRONG WAY, MAN! PUT ABOUT AND STAND CLEAR WHILE THE TROUBLE'S ON."*

"I'm going back," calmly answered Crouch, whose men had never ceased to row. "I'm going back to the ship, to save a boy who has been left on board."

At that, the officer gave vent to an exclamation of surprise, and then, raising his night glasses, vowed that he could see some one on the forecastle-peak, waving his arms about him wildly, like one who calls for assistance.

"Row ahead!" Crouch shouted to his men. "Row for all you're worth! That bomb has misfired, or I'm a Prussian. We'll save the stowaway yet."

A few more strong strokes of the oars, and the boat drew alongside the foot of the gangway steps. Crouch, agile as a panther, sprang on to the footboard, and racing to the main-deck, came on a sudden face to face with Jimmy.

"Come off!" he cried. "There's no time to spare."

Jimmy Burke could not refrain from smiling.

"It's all right," said he in a quiet voice. "It's all right; the ship's saved. There is no danger any longer."

Crouch, catching his breath, stared at the boy in amazement.

"Saved!" he repeated.

"Yes. The bomb has been thrown overboard. I stayed on board to do it."

For at least a minute, Captain Crouch uttered never a word. Then, quietly, without any show of haste, he took his pipe from his pocket, filled it, struck a match and lit it, and puffed a cloud of smoke into the air.

"I've known many men," said he at last, "and I've seen most parts of the world. I was first introduced to danger--if I might call it so--when I was little more than a lad, and we've kept up a nodding acquaintance ever since. I've known different kinds of danger, too--all the family relations, so to speak: jungle fever, malaria, cholera and Black Jack; lions, tigers, rogue-elephants and buffalo, and the last's an ugly customer when he's wounded--you may take my word for that; I've seen war, shipwreck, cannibals, pygmies and sudden death; and I've known men who could hold their own in the midst of the whole boiling lot. But I've never seen, or heard, or read of, a finer thing, my boy, than you have done to-night. I say that because I mean it; and there's a hand to shake."

And Captain Crouch held out a hand which Jimmy took, to find himself held fast as in a grip of iron.

"I ask your pardon, lad," said Captain Crouch. "I did you a monstrous wrong. The evidence was against you, that's true enough. None the less, I might have found out the truth before now. But I didn't. So it's up to you to forgive."

Jimmy Burke knew not what to say. Indeed, he felt a little awkward. He was undemonstrative by nature, and Crouch still held his hand.

"I ask your pardon, lad," said the captain again. "I shan't feel happy till you've told me I'm forgiven."

"Of course, sir," said Jimmy, "I forgive. And after all, it was only natural you

should think as you did; the evidence was very black against me."

Crouch let go the boy's hand, and walked quickly to the head of the gangway. There he told the men in the boat below that the ship had been saved, and ordered them to ascend at once to the main-deck. After which, the captain himself hastened to the bridge, and there let loose the siren.

The loud shriek of the ship's hooter broke upon the silence of the night, to be echoed back from the Cornish hills, and to die away in the distance upon the moonlit sea. It was the signal for the other boats to return.

Time and again, Crouch sent out his message; and in between the hootings of the siren, the little, wizened sea-captain paced to and fro upon the bridge of the "Harlech" with quick and eager steps, his hands folded behind his back and his head enveloped in the cloud of smoke that issued from the bowl of his pipe. And in the meantime, His Majesty's ship "Cockroach"--a destroyer with a displacement of over nine hundred tons and a designed speed of thirty knots an hour, burning oil fuel only and armed with three four-inch guns and four torpedo-tubes--was flying hither and thither in the darkness like a mad dog in a storm.

# CHAPTER XVI--At the "Goat and Compasses"

Presently, the regular plashing sound of oars, accompanied by human voices, rapidly becoming louder and more distinct, warned Crouch that the other boats were returning to the ship.

One after the other, they showed up in the darkness like white hovering ghosts, keeping at a safe distance from the "Harlech" until assured that all danger was past.

A few minutes later, Crouch himself mustered all hands upon the main-deck, when it was discovered that the dinghy had not returned, and that the sole absentees were Stork, the ship's cook and his mate.

There was nothing to be gained by further delay. Stork, who had by now probably gained the shore at some desolate spot on the wild Cornish coast, was

not likely to pay much attention to the repeated hootings of the siren. He knew well enough that his secret was out; that for some reason or other the plot to destroy the ship had misfired, and that he was likely to receive scant mercy at the hands of Captain Crouch, who, for once in his life, had been fooled to the top of his bent. The so-called ship's carpenter knew when he was safe.

As was afterwards discovered, he experienced no difficulty in playing upon the simple mind of the cook, a chicken-hearted fellow at the best, who had already had more than enough of the merchant service in time of war. As chance had it, both this man and his mate lived at Truro, and ten minutes after the dinghy had been beached, Rudolf Stork was left to his own resources, with a free hand to go whithersoever he wished.

It is as well therefore that Crouch ordered the engine-room watch below, and got the ship under way on a straight course for the Needles, before the steel-blue streak of morning was far spread upon the eastern sky-line.

The U93 was nowhere to be seen. She may have descended to the sea-bed, to lie in hiding like a dog-fox in deep earth, or else made off straight for Wilhelmshaven at her top speed under water--probably the best part of ten knots, in all seas and weathers. As for the "Cockroach," she was more mad than ever, flying here and there with all the superfluous energy of her powerful turbine engines, looking for her stealthy and elusive quarry like a terrier hot on the scent of a rabbit. As the daylight grew, and a blood-red sun arose upon a calm, grey winter's sea, the Lizard light went out; and the coastguards at the trim white-washed signal station (which is what may be called the "booking-office" of the English Channel) watched through their telescopes a large trans-atlantic tramp, steaming eastward--spoken as the "Harlech," bound for Portsmouth--and little dreamed of the tragedy that had been so narrowly averted.

When the same ship reached the Solent, and the chalk cliffs of the Isle of Wight stood out like a bank of cloud, those on board had passed unscathed through a terrible ordeal, they had run the gauntlet of the seas in time of war, and played their several parts like men. And there was not one among them who did not realize that he had but Divine Providence to thank that he was still alive.

It so happened that it was Sunday; and with all hands assembled on the forward well-deck, Crouch read the service, and there was a meaning in the words of the psalm that went deep into the hearts of those rough, sea-faring men: "*If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall thy hand lead me.*" War brings men back to fundamental truths that were known of old in a warlike age when the majestic poetry of the psalms was first conceived: that the heart of man is a heart of sin and savagery, but over all is a God, just, yet full of mercy.

There is in Gosport--as, indeed, in every other port that lies between San

Francisco and Yokohama by way of the Manchester Ship Canal--a branch office of the firm of Jason, Stileman and May; and here, to no less a person than the senior partner of the firm (Mr. Jason, Senior, the uncle of the New York agent), Captain Crouch told his story from start to end, and did not hesitate to blame himself. He explained in full how he had been deceived by Rudolf Stork, who had escaped from the ship off the coast of Cornwall. He dwelt at length upon the part that had been played throughout by Jimmy Burke, who--on Crouch's showing--had saved the "Harlech" from complete and inevitable destruction.

Mr. Jason replied that the firm was not likely to forget the valuable services the boy had rendered. Crouch had had a long talk with Jimmy, and knew a certain amount of the boy's past history. Mr. Jason was personally willing to guarantee the boy's future; but, on hearing that Jimmy had no other ambition than to serve his country in her hour of need, he said that he would do what he could to assist the lad to enter the Army or Navy.

In the meantime, Jimmy was handed over to the care of Captain Crouch, who was instructed to look after him as if he were his own son. Crouch, who never had a son of his own, had rather vague ideas on the subject of paternal duties. He betook himself, together with his charge, to a certain small, old-fashioned hotel in a by-street, where he was in the habit of staying whenever his ship was lying in Portsmouth Harbour.

The name of this establishment was the "Goat and Compasses." In former times, under the sign of "God Encompass Thee"--a gentle salutation to the traveller--the place had been a well-known coaching inn, at the extremity of the famous Portsmouth road. In later times, as the English mercantile fleet swelled to the present proportions, it became a famous resort for ships' officers and master-mariners, such as Captain Crouch himself; and in the smoking-room of a winter's evening, when a wood fire of the pine logs of Hampshire blazed and sizzled in the grate, more tales were told of the five continents, the seven seas, and the islands of the South, than could very well be contained in a whole library of books of travel.

To the "Goat and Compasses," therefore, Crouch and Jimmy Burke departed, arm in arm. And the captain ashore--as we have said already--was a very different man from the captain afloat, on the quarter-deck or bridge. He was hail-fellow-well-met with almost every other person he encountered in the street. He informed an old lady, who sat knitting at an open window, that she was the possessor of an extraordinary fine canary. He gave a crossing-sweeper fourpence, and a tobacconist--from whom he purchased two pounds of his celebrated Bull's Eye Shag--the benefit of his views on German methods of warfare. At last, at the "Goat and Compasses," he ordered a meal that would have overtaxed the digestive powers of a hyæna, emphasizing the fact that what he called a healthy appetite

was the one and only outward (or inward) token of a Britisher.

It was during supper that something happened in the nature of a coincidence. It will be remembered that Jimmy Burke had taken nothing on board the "Harlech" except a few personal belongings, done up in a handkerchief, and a dry loaf of bread. He wore, however, a watch-chain which had once belonged to his father, and from this was suspended his half of the Admiral's lucky sixpence. On a sudden, Crouch's eyes became glued to this small shining souvenir.

It is as well to remember that Captain Crouch had an excellent memory. He was an extremely observant man, who took careful stock of everything that came his way.

"Pardon me," said he, "do you mind if I have a look at that broken sixpence?"

Jimmy handed the sixpence across the table. Crouch examined it for some time without saying a word. Then, he gave it back to its owner, and lying back in his chair, thrust both hands deep into his trousers pockets.

"How did you come by that?" he asked.

Forthwith Jimmy told the whole story of "Swiftsure Burke," who was his grandfather, and how the Admiral's lucky sixpence had been the saving of his life.

"And so," said Crouch, slowly nodding his head in approval, "and so you, who came on board my ship as a stowaway in New York, are a grandson of Admiral Burke! That's strange enough, but there's more still to marvel at. Where's the other half of the Admiral's lucky sixpence?"

Jimmy experienced some difficulty in explaining that his best friend on the other side of the Atlantic was a girl who had once worked in the same office as himself. He even went so far as to say that her name was Peggy Wade, and that it was for her that he had filed in half the little silver coin.

"That's what I mean," said Captain Crouch. "It's what you might call a kind of a concurrence. I met that girl in New York. She's in Mr. Jason's office; and we talked things over, she and I. I might even say, in a manner of speaking, that I took an uncommon fancy to the young lady; and, mind you, I've not been brought much in the way of womenfolk. I don't like 'em as a rule."

At that, Captain Crouch produced his pipe, and thumbed his black tobacco into the bowl.

"Swiftsure Burke," said he, as if to himself, "Swiftsure Burke was a man of whom the British Navy has every right to be proud. I'm more ashamed than I can say, when I think that I treated a grandson of his in the way I treated you. But, that's all past and done with. You must forget it, lad; for, though I was a blind fool, my heart was in the right place, and I meant it all for the best."

At that, Crouch rose suddenly from his chair, and stumped out of the room. With his cork foot he walked with a pronounced limp, though he was sufficiently

active to go upstairs two steps at a time. He led the way to a small sitting-room on the first floor; and there he and the boy remained, poring over the mysterious message that had been rescued from the sea-chest of Rudolf Stork, until the small hour of the morning.

Crouch, now that he knew for a fact that Rudolf Stork was a spy, was willing enough to spend hours endeavouring to decipher the message. Holding the paper first in one hand and then in the other, he read it over and over again.

> *Steamboat entrance verified. Evening navigate. Follow idea. Vernacular encumbrance. Enter into Guinea half-speed.*

At last, he laid down his pipe upon the table, and clapping his hands together, cried out, "I've got it!"

"Do you mean," said Jimmy, "that you can explain it?"

"Seems fair," said Crouch--a favourite expression of his, used as a rule to express an affirmative. "Seems fair. I was a bit puzzled at first, but it's plain sailing all right, once you've got the thread of it."

And thereupon the little captain went on to explain what he took to be the meaning of the message which, according to him, referred to a chart of some little-known and lonely island, probably in the Western Pacific.

He said that he thought that "Guinea" must refer to New Guinea, which is a German colony, and not to the Guinea that lies on the West Coast of Africa. The island alluded to was probably one of the smaller atolls lying to the south-east of the Indies. In this island, it appeared, there was a harbour, the entrance to which would admit sea-going steamers. Such a harbour, Crouch explained, would be invaluable to the German commerce-raiders operating in those waters.

The beginning of the message was therefore quite easy to understand. Soundings had evidently been taken, and the entrance found navigable. It was necessary, however, to negotiate the harbour in the evening, because there would then be less chance of being discovered.

The meaning of the next words, "Follow idea," Crouch was not wholly able to explain. He said it was possible that they referred to some suggestion made by the writer or, perhaps, by Rudolf Stork himself.

The rest of the message, according to Crouch, was simplicity itself. "Vernacular encumbrance"; in other words, the language would be a great difficulty. As the captain himself was able to testify, all branches of the Kanaka language were extremely difficult to learn; and it is not always easy to make South Sea Islanders understand by means of signs. If the Germans required this island as a secret base, or coaling station, they would first have to make friends with the inhabitants, since obviously they could not afford to keep a permanent garrison

in the place. The concluding sentence was altogether apparent. The chief port of German New Guinea, or Kaiser Wilhelm's land, is Stephansort, which lies at the end of Astrolabe Bay, and a ship entering the harbour would naturally steam at half-speed to avoid the numerous shoals.

The captain went on to say that, since there was no doubt that Stork was a German spy, he had probably received definite instructions in regard to the wireless station in New Guinea against which, it was believed, an Australian expedition had already been despatched. It was even probable that the message was not without reference to the German cruiser, the "Emden," which in point of fact had already been overhauled and destroyed.

"None the less," said Crouch in conclusion, "there's mischief enough brewing in all conscience. So far as I can see, there's nothing to prevent the enemy's light cruisers breaking away from Kiel and taking to the high seas, where, by reason of their great speed, they are capable of doing a great deal more damage than the submarines. That this message refers to some secret coaling-station in the Western Pacific I have not a shadow of doubt."

There was something so simple, and yet so probable, in Captain Crouch's explanation, that Jimmy Burke was from the first both interested and filled with admiration for the little captain's ingenuity. The more he read the message the more was he certain that Crouch was on the right track. As for the captain himself, now fairly launched upon the subject of his travels, there is no knowing when he would have left off talking of coral islands, cannibals and great banana festivals, had not, on a sudden, Jimmy's attention been attracted by a very singular thing.

Regarding the message from over Crouch's shoulder, he was struck by an extraordinary coincidence, which he had not noticed before, namely, that the first letters of the first five words were S-E-V-E-N.

He pointed this out at once to Crouch; whereupon it appeared that in similar fashion the first letters of the next four words spelt F-I-V-E.

Captain Crouch was so amazed that he even paused in the act of lighting his pipe, with the result that he burnt his fingers with the match.

"That's strange," said he. "It may be we've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. What about the rest of it? Have the first letters of the remaining words any sort of meaning?"

Letter by letter Jimmy spelt them out.

"E-I-G-H-S."

"There's a flaw there," said Crouch. "It should end up with a T. That last word should be *eight*."

By then Jimmy was wildly excited. The whole affair had suddenly become not only interesting, but vastly thrilling.

"What about the *last* letters of each word?" he exclaimed.

"T-E-D-G," spelt Crouch. "That means nothing, so far as my knowledge goes."

"What's the next letter?" asked the boy.

"E," said Crouch. "T-E-D-G-E, that spells nothing either." Then suddenly his expression changed. "Wait a moment!" he exclaimed. "What about this? Supposing the last word, which is *half-speed*, counts as one word, and not as two. Take the first letters of each word, and then go back to the beginning and take the last letters. That makes the 't' at the end of *steamboat*, the last letter of the word 'eight'----"

"And then," cried Jimmy, taking the words out of the captain's mouth, "then the last letters are E-D-G-E-W-A-R-E-R-O-A-D."

"Edgeware Road!" cried Crouch, "by all that's wonderful and mad!"

They looked at one another with the blank expression of men who are half-dazed. Then Crouch produced a pencil from his pocket, and wrote down this new interpretation of Rudolf Stork's mysterious instructions--

It was only natural that Jimmy should look for advice to Captain Crouch, who was considerably older and far more experienced than himself.

"And whatever does that mean?" he demanded.

Crouch made a wry face, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Ask me another!" said he. "I know well enough where the Edgware Road is, and seeing that I was born and bred in London I suppose I ought to. But, if you want to know what that has got to do with my secret coaling-station in the South Sea Islands, I'm afraid you've come to the wrong shop. Seven hundred and fifty-eight, Edgware Road! Jimmy, my lad, we're no nearer the solution of this mystery than we were before--in fact, it seems to me, we've lost our bearings in a fog."

In addition to which, there is no denying that Captain Crouch felt not a little personally aggrieved that his own lucid explanation, his strange, fantastic solution concerning some mysterious Pacific island, should be supplanted by so commonplace and well-known a locality as the Edgware Road in London.

"My boy," said he, knocking out his pipe on the toe of his cork foot, "we'll go to this address, just you and I, and find out who's at home."

"When?" asked Jimmy, all eagerness.

"When!" repeated Crouch. "Why, now."

# CHAPTER XVII--Number 758

The more they thought about the whole strange, mysterious business, the more was it apparent that they were face to face with plain matter-of-fact. It was now obvious that the written message was nothing more than the memorandum of an address. Every Londoner knows the Edgware Road. Stork, however, or perhaps Rosencrantz or von Essling, the German military attaché, had thought it advisable to write it down, and that in such a manner that it would be extremely improbable that any one else could read it.

Captain Crouch was once again upon his feet, limping backwards and forwards from one end of the room to the other, talking in a quick, excited voice, and flinging his arms about him like a windmill.

"We must go to London at once," he cried. And at that, he hastened from the room, to find the whole hotel in complete darkness. The "Goat and Compasses" kept late hours as a rule; but it was now two o'clock in the morning, and everyone had long since gone to bed. Crouch found his bedroom candle and lit it, and with the aid of this searched the smoking-room for a South-Western Railway time-table, a copy of which he at length succeeded in finding. Licking the end of his second finger, he turned over the pages so rapidly that he tore several in half.

"Here we are!" he cried. "There's a workmen's train at three-fifteen. We'll catch that, and be in London before daybreak."

Crouch woke up the proprietor in order to pay his bill, concerning which neither was much inclined to argue, the one being too sleepy and the other in too great haste even to count his change. They had little in the way of luggage, and Crouch had been well supplied with money by Mr. Jason, who was determined that Jimmy Burke should want for nothing. Accordingly, in little more than an hour after they had discovered that Stork's message was nothing more or less than a simple acrostic cypher, they were speeding to London at the rate of forty miles an hour, both sound asleep on the comfortable cushions in a first-class railway carriage.

Crouch had his own rooms in Pimlico, where he had constituted his headquarters--so to speak--and where he rented two rooms, divided one from the

other by folding doors. In one was a camp-bed and a veritable armoury of big-game rifles and shotguns; whereas the other, which he called the dining-room, contained a table, a few basket chairs, and many kinds of curios from all parts of the world. The walls of both rooms were adorned with the heads and antlers of many rare animals: waterbuck and koodoo, white and black leopards, jaguars, tigers and lions.

Thither, on a cold, dark, wintry morning, Crouch and his young companion hastened immediately on their arrival at Waterloo, chartering the only taxi that was to be found at that early hour.

First, it was necessary to have breakfast, during which Crouch explained that it would be certainly advisable for them to disguise themselves. In all probability, Stork would repair to the house in the Edgware Road, and it would never do for them to be recognized. They had the whole morning at their disposal, and it must be admitted that the precautions that the little sea-captain deemed it expedient to take bordered on the ludicrous.

For himself he purchased an extremely vulgar-looking shepherd's plaid suit, a flaming red tie, and a white bowler hat which he set jauntily on the side of his head at a very acute angle.

As for Jimmy, it has been stated that he was a fair boy, with light brown hair. That was now dyed completely black. A similar darkening of the eyebrows, carried out by an expert in the art of "making up," completed the boy's disguise, to the complete satisfaction of Captain Crouch and the delight of Jimmy himself.

"My lad," said Crouch, "I'd lay a sheet-anchor to a safety-pin your best friend wouldn't know you now. As for me, I'll go so far as to shave off my moustache and beard."

A little after, he entered a barber's shop, and having fulfilled his promise, looked, without his moustache and small imperial beard, even more formidable than ever. His great, square, protruding chin suggested a determined and aggressive nature; whereas his thin, tightly compressed lips proved convincingly enough that here was a man who could not be trifled with.

They lunched together in a fashionable restaurant in the West End, where Crouch, in the strange and wonderful costume, was evidently under the impression that he was cutting a dash. Thence, arm-in-arm, they sallied forth up Regent Street and along Oxford Street, in the direction of the Edgware Road, entering a gunsmith's on the way and purchasing a brace of revolvers and a score of rounds of ammunition.

They found Number 758 to be a large block of unoccupied flats. Crouch stationed himself on the opposite side of-the road, and regarded the building for some time in silence.

"There's one thing about the place which is suspicious," he observed. "Do

you notice that every one of those flats is unoccupied, with the exception of one on the first floor? On the ground floor are shop premises, also 'To let.' Now, when you come to think of it, that is a very remarkable thing. This is a popular and central part of London, and one moreover in which rents are fairly moderate. Also, the agent's notice on the ground floor has, by the look of it, been there for months. Come, my boy, we'll look into the matter. But have your revolver ready in case of an emergency, don't hesitate to use it, and take your lead from me."

So saying, the little captain stepped across the street, and rang the bell of Number 758, Edgware Road.

They did not have to wait long before the door was opened by an old woman with a shawl about her shoulders, who asked who they were in an exceedingly squeaky voice.

"Are you Mr. Russell?" she piped, the moment she set eyes upon Captain Crouch.

Crouch thought for a moment before he answered.

"I won't say I'm not," said he; "on the other hand, I won't go so far as to say I am. The main question is, who are you?"

"I'm Mrs. Wycherley," said the old woman, "her that looks after the flat. And if you're Mr. Russell, the rooms are well aired and the fires was a-lighted this morning."

"Ha!" said Crouch. "That's just as it should be. I and my friend will go upstairs."

At that, without a moment's hesitation, he brushed past the old woman and ascended the stairs to the first floor, whither Mrs. Wycherley followed him, muttering a great deal to herself on the subject of "the rheumatics."

"Where's the key?" demanded Crouch.

There was an air of self-assurance about him that would have deceived a Russian diplomat, to say nothing of a London charwoman of about seventy years of age. Mrs. Wycherley, producing the key, flung open the door of one of the first-floor flats and ushered in both Jimmy Burke and Captain Crouch.

They found themselves in a small self-contained flat, consisting of three rooms and a kitchen. These rooms were not only tastefully, but even expensively, furnished; whereas the kitchen was complete as far as furniture and cooking utensils were concerned.

Crouch had a good look round, and then, producing his blackened briar pipe, seated himself in the most comfortable armchair in the dining-room, and proceeded to smoke at his leisure. Both Jimmy and the charwoman remained standing.

"There are a few points," said Crouch, fixing the old lady with the mouthpiece of his pipe, in much the same way as a man would point a pistol, "there are

one or two things I would like to know."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said the woman, "if you're a friend of Mr. Russell's, and Mr. Russell knows you're here, well and good. But if you ain't, might I make so free as to ask your business, because my daughter, Emily Jane, lies a-dying, and that's as true as I'm standing here, and it's no time for me to be gossiping with gents with white hats, nor black neither."

She had spoken exceedingly fast, from time to time lifting her voice to a higher key, until at last she pulled up short, apparently for want of breath, having reached the topmost note she was capable of producing.

"Mum," said Crouch, "don't you get fidgety. I'm an honest man, though a dog-breeder by profession. As for Russell, he knows me well enough, or he was never a ship's carpenter that cut off in a dinghy with the ship's cook and the cook's mate. So you may set your mind at rest."

Old Mrs. Wycherley, who had not the least idea as to what Crouch was talking about, folded her arms, and nodded her head as in approval.

"If you're a friend of Mr. Russell's," said she, "I'm sure it's all right. Perhaps you don't know, sir, that I'm expecting him here this evening."

"Is that so?" said Crouch. "I'm glad to hear it."

"Maybe you'll stay," said the old woman, "until Mr. Russell arrives?"

"I will that," said Crouch, feeling in his coat pocket for his revolver. Then, in a changed voice, he remarked, "These are fairly comfortable rooms."

"Comfortable!" exclaimed the old woman. "Fit for a king, I calls them. And that clean you could eat your dinner off of the carpet, as no one knows better than me who've worked day and night as I'm a living woman."

"When did Mr. Russell leave?" asked Crouch.

"Leave! Why he ain't never come since the flat was took."

"And when was that?"

"On the fourth of August, sir. My memory ain't of the best, and I only recollect the date because it was on that day, sir, that this here 'orrible war broke out. The fourth of August was the date, or I ain't never been married, which I've lived to repent ever since the very moment the ring was put on me finger."

Crouch sat silent for a moment, mersed in thought, filling the room with clouds of his evil-smelling tobacco smoke.

"How is it," he asked at length, "that none of the other flats in the building have been taken?"

"There's no knowing," said the old woman. "But the fact is, that since August no one, saving yourself, ain't been near the place."

Crouch drew a whistle and looked across at Jimmy; then, once more, he turned to Mrs. Wycherley.

"And what about Emily Jane?" he asked.

"She was took bad three weeks ago, and ain't left her bed for a fortnight. And it's my solemn belief as all her blood's turned to water."

Whereupon, as the old woman showed signs of tears, Crouch thought it advisable to change the subject; which he did with great dexterity.

"How do you know," he asked, "that Mr. Russell arrives this evening?"

"Because Mr. Valentine rung me up on the telegraph, and said as I was to have the rooms ready by eight o'clock this evening."

"And who is Mr. Valentine?"

"Don't know no more than you, sir, except that he's the gent what took the rooms in August, as I'm a-telling you."

"Well, then," said Crouch, "I don't think you need trouble to stay. You can go back to Emily Jane. I and my friend will remain here until Mr. Russell arrives. We'll keep the fire alight, and make ourselves at home."

Mrs. Wycherley, who a moment since had been on the verge of tears, gathered her shawl about her shoulders, and beamed upon Captain Crouch.

"And it may be," said the little captain, "that Emily Jane will be none the worse for a few comforts, such as beef-tea and a jelly. On your way home, you might be able to get her something with that."

So saying, he banged down a sovereign on the table, which Mrs. Wycherley was not slow to accept.

"Then with your permission," said she, "I think I'll just be stepping round."

With that, and with a curtsey, she was off, with much more alacrity than she had shown before.

# CHAPTER XVIII--"Mr. Russell"

Left alone with Jimmy, Crouch solemnly refilled his pipe.

"The moment I first set eyes on her," he observed, "I summed that old woman up. Emily Jane's a hoax."

"Are you sure of it?" asked Jimmy.

"Absolutely certain," said Crouch. "I don't imagine for a moment that the old woman's in league with a gang of German spies; else she would never have shown us up here. For all that, she's not to be trusted further than a first engineer

can throw a quoit. That's all the better for us. I don't suppose she'll come back to-night."

"And what about these men, Russell and Valentine?" asked Jimmy. "Who are they, do you think?"

"Valentine may be any one," answered Crouch. "But I've a shrewd suspicion that Russell is Rudolf Stork. Stork has now been in England three days. He has had plenty of time in which to get to London."

"And if he turns up," asked the boy, "what are we to do?"

"If it's necessary, shoot him like a dog," said Crouch, forgetting that he was not on his ship's deck.

For the next half-hour, they systematically searched the whole flat, but could find nothing suspicious. There was an aspect of newness about the place; carpets, curtains, and cushions had evidently come straight from the furnishers, and showed no signs of wear. In an old-fashioned Sheraton bureau were writing and blotting paper, ink and pens; but, the blotting paper was quite spotless, and the pen nibs had never been dipped into the ink.

"There's nothing here," said Crouch. "We shall have to wait for Stork."

And hardly had the words left his lips than a bell rang, somewhere in the room. Jimmy started, and even Crouch carried a hand to the coat pocket that contained his revolver. The moment was one of intense excitement; they were face to face with great events. It was as if the atmosphere of the room was electrified by the strong current of anticipation.

"The telephone!" cried Jimmy, pointing to the wall.

In a moment, Crouch had the receiver to his ear. He had the wisdom not to speak, until he had found out who it was who had rung up the unoccupied flat, and this proved to be no less a person than the mysterious "Mr. Valentine," who was speaking from the "Hotel Magnificent" in the Strand. "Are you there?" he asked. "Are you the charwoman?"

Crouch replied at once, in the old woman's squeaky voice.

"I'm Mrs. Wycherley," said he.

"I told you," said the voice, "that you were to expect Mr. Russell this evening. He will probably arrive at about eight o'clock."

"Very well, sir," said Crouch. "The rooms is aired, and all the fires was alighted this morning, and everything's that clean you could eat your dinner off the carpet, as sure as my Emily Jane's blood has turned to water."

"Shut up!" cried "Valentine," so loudly that even Jimmy was able to hear. "I've not rung up to hear about Emily Jane. I intended to come round this evening, to meet Mr. Russell on his arrival; but I have to go to Edinburgh at once, on extremely urgent business, and have only just time to catch my train. Can you hear what I say?"

"Bless you, yes, sir," answered Crouch. "It don't make no difference whether it's the butcher or a hundred-weight o' coal, I allus makes use of the telegraph, and I don't take no sauce from the young woman in the middle."

"Then, listen here," said "Valentine." "I'm sending round a messenger-boy with an important sealed letter. On no account whatever are you to let this letter out of your hands, until you give it to Mr. Russell, the very moment he arrives."

"Valentine," in order to make quite sure that Mrs. Wycherley had heard aright and understood, made Crouch repeat his instructions word for word. That done he rang off, apparently in the greatest haste, no doubt fearing to miss his train.

Captain Crouch was wildly excited. Jamming his white bowler hat well on to the back of his head, he proclaimed that they were hot upon the scent of the gang. Mrs. Wycherley had left him in possession of the key of the flat; and going down to the front door, he waited impatiently for the messenger to arrive.

The messenger-boy had some diffidence about handing over the letter to Crouch, saying that he understood that he was to deliver it to a charwoman. Crouch, however, was not to be denied, and with the sealed letter in his hand returned to Jimmy.

To break the seal and tear open the envelope was the work of a few seconds. The letter was written in German, of which language Crouch and Jimmy knew enough to make out the meaning, though there were one or two words that neither could understand. With the translation of "Valentine's" letter all doubt was dispelled that the unknown "Mr. Russell" was any one else than Rudolf Stork, the ship's carpenter of the "Harlech."

The letter began with the words "Dear Stork," and continued to the following effect: A sea raid had been planned on the North Coast, against the dockyards of the Forth and Tyne. All German submarines had been warned, with the exception of the U93, whose wireless had been probably by H.M. Destroyer "Cockroach." The U93 had come north-eastward from the Lizard, had passed the Straits of Dover in safety, and was now lying somewhere in the vicinity of the Wellbank lightship, which is a little north of the latitude of the Tyne.

Immediately on his arrival in London, Stork was to go to Hull, taking the first and fastest train. Thence, he was to put to sea in a fishing smack, the "Marigold," the skipper of which was in the pay of "Valentine." He was to find the U93, and tell her to proceed due east without delay, to meet the German fleet, issuing from the Bight of Heligoland, and which would comprise some of the biggest battle-cruisers ever built: notably, the "Derfflinger," the "Seydlitz," the "Blücher," and the "Moltke."

Captain Crouch was a man of iron nerve; but, when he realized the colossal magnitude of the plot with which they were confronted, even he could not control

the features of his face. As for Jimmy Burke, his lips were parted, and when he held the letter in his hand, the sheet of paper trembled like a leaf. Scene by scene, the great drama that had opened in the offices of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern unfolded itself before the eyes of those who were something more than mere spectators. And each scene, it appeared, was more dramatic, more fraught with terrible consequences and possibilities of triumph or disaster, than that which had gone before.

It took Jimmy Burke some time to find his breath. He was so excited that he found it difficult to speak.

"There's not a moment to lose!" he cried. "We must report what we know both to the Admiralty and Scotland Yard."

"We can't leave this place," said Crouch. "Stork may turn up at any minute; it must be nearly eight o'clock already. I'll ring up the Yard, at once."

He went straight to the telephone, where almost immediately he got into communication with the famous headquarters of the London Police. He was informed that a superintendent-detective would be sent at once to Number 758, Edgware Road.

Crouch placed the receiver back upon its rest, and pulled out his watch.

"It's past eight o'clock," said he. "Russell should be here."

It was at that very moment that they heard the sound of footsteps upon the stone staircase without. Crouch hurried to the door and threw it open; and there entered three men, two of whom were young, whilst the other was considerably over sixty.

Both Crouch and Jimmy scanned the face of each man as he entered, and both, with their hands in their pockets, grasped the handles of their revolvers. In spite of the intense excitement of the moment, Jimmy Burke was conscious of a feeling of bitter disappointment, when he saw that not one of these three men was Rudolf Stork.

Each of the two younger men was well over six feet in height, broad of shoulder and deep of chest. They were dressed precisely the same, and wore blue suits, light-coloured overcoats, brown boots and wide-brimmed, black felt hats. As for the older man, he had the appearance of a professor, or some sage of ancient times; there was something about him that might almost be described as druidical. His hair was quite white, very long and somewhat greasy. He had a white beard that reached almost to his waist. His nose was long and aquiline, and his eyes much magnified by a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. In his hand he carried an ash-plant, so knotted and heavy at the head that it resembled a club. It was he who was the first to speak, staring at Crouch over the top of his spectacles.

"Pardon me," he observed, in a voice that was exceedingly soft; "pardon me, but I have not the pleasure."

"Nor I," said Captain Crouch.

"I think you must have made a mistake," the old man went on. "My name is Russell--Theophilus Russell--and this flat belongs to me."

"Then," said Crouch, "there must certainly be some mistake. My name is Shakespeare--Melchisedek Shakespeare--and this flat happens to belong to me."

Mr. Russell adjusted his spectacles upon his nose, and looked around the room.

"There should be a woman here," said he; "a Mrs. Wycherley."

"She's gone out," said Crouch.

The old man smiled and pointed with his stick.

"Why, there she is!" he exclaimed. "How strange that I never noticed her before."

He had pointed to the armchair, at the other end of the room, in which Crouch had formerly been seated. The whole thing was so cleverly planned, the old man's voice was so dulcet and confiding, and his expression of surprise so admirably feigned, that Crouch could not resist the wholly natural impulse of turning round, to see for himself whether or not Mrs. Wycherley were there.

His eyes had not left the old man's face for longer than the fraction of a second before there took place a kind of transfiguration which was even more terrible to see than it was surprising.

There had been something about the patriarchal figure of the old, white-bearded man that was gentle, beneficent and charitable. His expression had been that of one who looks upon the world, and all its fooleries and foibles, with the comfortable tolerance of age. On a sudden, this expression changed. His eyes flashed; his brows became knit in a savage frown. At the same time, this transformation extended to his body, which straightened, quivered, and even seemed to grow larger. Before it was possible to guess what he was about to do, or make the slightest movement by way of self-defence, he had raised his heavy ash-plant high above his shoulder, and brought it down with a crashing blow upon the head of Captain Crouch.

The little sea-captain had been taken unawares. Once again had he been fooled. He let out a groan, spun round like a top, and then came down heavily upon the floor.

In so short a space of time did this calamity occur that Jimmy Burke had barely time to act. He had taken two steps forward, and had got so far as drawing his revolver from his pocket, when he was seized and held fast in the powerful arms of the two younger men. Before he had time to cry out, or even to realize what had happened, he found himself not only with a gag thrust into his mouth, but with both hands handcuffed behind his back.

Russell laughed aloud, in a voice that was far from dulcet.

"I saw through your disguise," he cried, pointing to the prostrate figure of the little captain, "the very moment I entered the room. Something more is needed than a white bowler hat and a scarlet necktie to conceal the identity of Captain Crouch."

At that, Crouch struggled to his feet, and stood for a second swaying. Then, with a loud cry and a kind of lurch forward, he flung himself like a wild-cat upon the old man, whom he seized roughly by the throat.

"You villain!" he shouted at the full power of his lungs.

So great was his passion, so amazing his agility, that there is little doubt he would have strangled the old villain then and there, had it not been for the two younger men, who hurled themselves upon his back.

They dragged him away as though he had been a mad dog, but not until he had seized Russell by his long, flowing beard, which he tore, not piecemeal, but bodily, in a mass, from the old man's wrinkled face.

[image]

*CROUCH SEIZED RUSSELL BY HIS LONG, FLOWING BEARD, WHICH HE TORE BODILY FROM THE OLD MAN'S FACE.*

A moment later, Crouch, like Jimmy Burke, stood handcuffed. Panting, literally foaming at the mouth, he glared at his assailant. And as he glared, it was as if his single eye grew larger in his head. His thin lips parted, though not a word escaped him; it was as if amazement had struck him dumb.

The truth was, he found himself confronted by the most surprising part of an incident which, from start to finish, was at once unlooked-for and bewildering. For, the old man, bereft of his spectacles and beard, stood before Crouch discovered and confessed; and in place of the grey and patriarchal features of the so-called "Mr. Russell" was the seamed and weather-beaten countenance of Rudolf Stork.

# CHAPTER XIX--A Clue

It may seem surprising that our good friend Captain Crouch (who was very far from a fool) should have been gulled so successfully, and on no less than two occasions, by Rudolf Stork. It must not be forgotten, however, that Stork had been an actor, who knew well not only how to disguise himself, but how to change his voice, and the expression of his face, and to assume those habits and little mannerisms by which personality is made evident. He not only looked the part of an old dry-as-dust professor, but acted up to it so cleverly that both Crouch and Jimmy Burke were quite deceived.

When he found himself overpowered and handcuffed, when he saw how completely he had been duped, Captain Crouch could not conceal his rage and mortification. He shouted at the full power of his lungs, in a vain hope that some one would hear and hasten to his help, forgetful for the moment that the building was utterly deserted, that Mrs. Wycherley was not likely to return.

In any case, Rudolf Stork was not the man to run unnecessary risks; his case was altogether desperate. To silence Crouch by means of a gag, accompanied by a vicious kick in the ribs, was a task of not much difficulty, nor one that took longer than a minute at the most.

Stork then rose to his full height, and placing both arms akimbo, looked down upon his victims, who lay side by side upon the floor.

"If I had killed you out of hand," said he, "you'd have nothing but your own cleverness to blame. You should have learnt by now to let sleeping dogs lie. Let me tell you this, Captain Crouch, as one sailor to another: you set foot on dangerous ground the moment you thought fit to interfere with me."

Going down upon a knee, he turned out their pockets, finding first the keys which Crouch had obtained from Mrs. Wycherley, and then the brace of revolvers that they had purchased that very morning.

"You came prepared, I see," he grumbled. "It's just as well I thought to disguise myself, or, like as not, I should have been shot on sight."

And then, in the inner pocket of Crouch's coat, he discovered the letter

written by "Valentine" in German, which had come in a sealed envelope from the "Hotel Magnificent." Without a word, he read it to the end, and then, folding it carefully, put it away in a letter-case which he kept in a hip-pocket along with a jack-knife large enough to cut a loaf of bread.

"The fat's in the fire," said he, turning to his companions; "there's no doubt as to that. These fellows know more than is good for them. We must put them out of the way. It's a nasty business, but war's war, and those who employ me don't stick at trifles, such as the life of a tramp skipper and a stowaway."

At that, one of the younger men lifted a hand--a quick, nervous gesture, denoting at once surprise and consternation.

"Kill them!" he exclaimed.

"There's no other way," said Rudolf Stork.

"I don't like it," said the other.

The third man now spoke for the first time. "It would be madness," said he, "and a cold-blooded business as well. We can leave them here, handcuffed, gagged, and with their feet bound tightly."

"There's the old woman," said Stork. "She'll find them for a certainty before twelve hours are past. For myself, I take no risks."

"I'll not be a party to it," said the man who had spoken first.

"Then you're a fool," cried Stork. "You fail to realize the gravity of the business. A raid has been planned on the North Sea coast, and these two know all about it. In any case, the raid will take place, there's no time now to stop it; and if the British Admiralty is warned, the result will be disastrous. Whatever happens, the lips of these two men must be closed, for five days at least." Then on a sudden, he changed his voice and slapped a hand upon his thigh. "I've got it!" he exclaimed. "Valentine purchased the whole of this building, on behalf of the German Secret Service, in order that we should have no eavesdroppers in the way of next-door neighbours. I've got the keys here. We'll lock them both up in one of the empty flats, the one on the top floor for choice. There, they'll be well out of the way, and as good as dead."

This idea commended itself to both the younger men. It was eminently safe, and presented not the least difficulty. Also, it had the advantage of evading the terrible responsibilities of wilful murder.

Accordingly, the two captives were carried up to the top storey of the building, where, after their legs had been tightly bound, they were locked up in an empty room. Here not even Mrs. Wycherley would find them. From the amount of dust upon the floor and windows, and the innumerable cobwebs suspended from the ceiling, it was evident that no one had entered the flat since the very day upon which the last tenant had left it. Even had Crouch and Jimmy not been gagged, and had they shouted till they were hoarse, they could never have made

themselves heard. Neither was there any possible means of escape. They were shut up in a room which had once been used as a bedroom, and the hall door of the flat was locked from the outer side. The only window--which was quite small--looked out upon the roofs and chimney-pots of the adjacent houses several feet below.

Since Stork and his companions could afford to waste no time, the whole of this dastardly business was carried out quickly and in silence. And in less than ten minutes after the suggestion had been made, Crouch and Jimmy Burke were left alone, listening to the receding footsteps of the German spy and his confederates growing fainter and fainter as the three men descended flight after flight of stairs.

The thoughts of a man who finds himself in such a situation cannot be of the pleasantest. What Crouch's were, no one is ever likely to know, since--for very shame, perhaps--he ever afterwards kept them to himself. As for Jimmy Burke, he felt then, and quite believed, that from the very days of his boyhood, his life, and every enterprise he had ever undertaken, was doomed to failure. So far, nothing had gone well with him; and now that his fortunes were bound up with those of Captain Crouch, it seemed that he was to lead even the little sea-captain--hitherto so masterful--along the straight and certain path to unmerited disaster.

There are moments in the lives of us all when despondency obscures our outlook upon life, in much the same manner as a thunder-cloud darkens a summer sky. And yet, we should learn that Hope can remain with us to the last. We can no more foresee the actions of other men that influence our own lives--often indirectly--than we can foretell the dispensations of Providence itself. Always, we are in God's hands; it behoves us to act like men, and put our trust in Him.

It is possible to become so hopeless that we deliberately turn our backs upon the brighter side of things; and this is what goes by the name of pessimism. And now Jimmy Burke, giving himself up for lost, was quite unable to remember that there still existed a very great possibility that both he and Captain Crouch would be discovered.

Indeed, not more than ten minutes had elapsed after Stork had taken his departure, when suddenly the whole house was made to echo with a dull, thudding sound, as if some one were banging on a door. This noise continued without ceasing for at least five minutes. It appeared to proceed from the lower part of the building. At first, the boy could not think what it was; and then, on a sudden, like a bright flash of light in the midst of all the gloom of his despondency, he remembered that Crouch had rung up Scotland Yard, and that in all probability it was the police themselves who were below.

Apparently the same thought occurred to Crouch, for the little captain made a sudden and desperate effort to free himself; and presently, by some means or other, he managed to stagger to his feet, only to fall once more prostrate to the

ground.

For all that, he was not one to admit that he had failed so easily. He got to his feet again, stumbled across the room and threw all his weight upon the door.

Captain Crouch was neither tall nor heavily built; he could not have weighed more than nine stone; and, naturally enough, he failed to break open the lock--even if that had been his intention. He fell to the ground a second time, bruised and out of breath; but there was a possibility that the noise had been heard by those who were within the building.

For some seconds they waited in suspense, listening intently, silent and quite helpless. And then, they heard footsteps on the stairs, and the sound of voices, and some one trying the doors.

Crouch got to his feet again. He could not cry out because of the gag that was still fastened in his mouth. He had no other means of making his whereabouts known than the method he had tried before. Again he threw his weight upon the door and fell heavily to the ground.

This time there could be no doubt that he had succeeded in his purpose. A man came to the outer door of the flat, tried to open it and failed, and then called out in a loud voice, asking who was within.

Neither Crouch nor Jimmy could answer. It must also be remembered that the room in which they were imprisoned was quite dark, save for the fact that a full moon had arisen which had cast upon the floor a square pattern criss-crossed by the shadows of the framework of the window. Since the flat was quite unfurnished and the walls of the passages were bare, human voices were magnified in sound, and it was possible to hear quite distinctly what was said by those outside the door. The voice of one man was particularly distinct. Not only was it louder than the others, but its tones were authoritative; it was he who gave orders to those who were with him. As they guessed from the very first, this was Superintendent-detective Etheridge--a man whose reputation in his own line of business was second to none.

"Go on, man!" he exclaimed. "Break the door down. There's no time to waste trying to force the lock."

There was a dull thudding sound, as the full weight of a six-foot London policeman was hurled against the door.

"Try again," said the detective; "and this time all four of us together."

There was a pause, during which, no doubt, the detective and his companions gathered themselves together; and then, as one man, they threw themselves forward, so that four heavy shoulders struck the door a single blow.

The combined weight of these men could not have been less than fifty-four stone, at the very lowest estimate; and that is a shock that a modern spruce-wood doorway was never constructed to stand. Not only was the lock broken open, so

that the woodwork of the jamb was splintered for at least a foot, but the hinges were wrenched bodily away. The outer door flung back with a crash, and a second later the detective and his men found themselves in the passage of the flat.

"Which room is it?" cried Etheridge. "Where are you?" he shouted at the full power of his lungs.

Crouch could not answer by word of mouth, but he could do just as well. Sitting as upright as he could, he spun round like a top, so that his two heels rapped out upon the door. Then he rolled over and over, until he had gained the security of the centre of the room.

It was Etheridge who spoke again.

"Here!" he cried. "This room! All together, as before!"

The inner door was forced even more easily than the first. As it fell inwards, and four burly figures burst into the room, both Crouch and Jimmy were blinded by the sudden glare of three policemen's lanterns. A moment later the gags were taken from their mouths, and they were free to speak.

"Who are you?" asked the detective, assisting the little sea-captain to his feet and unlocking his handcuffs.

"I'm the man who rang you up," said Crouch. "The rascals left here not twenty minutes ago. Had you come sooner, you would have bagged all three of them. As it is, there's no knowing where they've gone, nor whether we'll ever see them again."

There were a hundred things the detective wished to know. As yet he had been told nothing, beyond the fact that Captain Crouch had certain information in regard to a gang of spies. Together they went down to the first-floor flat, where they turned on the electric light, and where Crouch answered the detective's questions, telling his whole story in instalments, so to speak.

They had not a copy of the mysterious message which Jimmy Burke had found on board the "Harlech"; but this made no difference, since both Crouch and Jimmy knew it by heart. In order to explain to the detective how they had discovered the address in the Edgware Road, Jimmy went to the writing-table, and taking pen and ink, wrote out the message.

They explained to the detective how they had discovered the concealed address in the first and last letters of every word; and then they were able to see something of the peculiar workings of a great detective's mind.

In this world, there is reason in all things--even in those things which may seem most trivial and unimportant. The criminal investigator must not be satisfied with facts; it is his business to find out the why and wherefore of everything that comes in his way. Moreover, he must be observant; he can afford to miss nothing. As often as not, a clue is to be found in the most improbable place.

Superintendent-detective Etheridge had no sooner read the message a sec-

ond time than he laid hold upon a clue.

"This message," said he, waving the paper in his hand, "was written by a man who does not know London well."

"How's that?" said Crouch. "As far as I can see, there's no way of telling who wrote it. It was picked up on board the ship that I commanded, that by all the laws of chance and methods of modern warfare should have been sent sky-high, to be no more than a ton or so of floating wreckage."

The detective preferred to hold to his own opinion; and it must be confessed that that opinion was likely to be right.

"It was written," he repeated, "by a man who does not know London well. Otherwise, he would have been able to spell 'Edgware Road.'"

Etheridge had now spread the paper upon the table, and both Crouch and Jimmy were gazing over his shoulder, whilst the three plain-clothes policemen stood together in the doorway.

"Edgware Road," the detective went on, "does not happen to be spelt with an 'e.' This cypher was evidently concocted by a man who--if not an Englishman himself--was well able to write--and, in all probability, speak--the English language. He was not, however, personally acquainted with London. For myself, in view of what you have told me, I should say that it was written by one of the German gang you discovered in New York."

"I have it!" cried the boy. "When I overheard the conversation that took place in Rosencrantz's office, I remember that von Essling himself said that, though he was well acquainted with the English language, he had never been to London, but expected to go there shortly."

Etheridge, who had produced a large note-book from his pocket in which he was scribbling a few hasty lines, closed it with a snap.

"That settles it," said he. "The Baron von Essling and this 'Mr. Valentine' who lives at the 'Hotel Magnificent' are one and the same person. I've no doubt of it whatever."

"What proof have you of that?" asked Captain Crouch.

"No proof," said the detective. "I set to work on bare suspicion, and leave proof to the last. In this case my suspicions are well founded. A few days before war was declared, a man, passing himself off as 'Lewis Valentine,' landed at Liverpool, having crossed from New York on the 'Olympic.' He is known to have stayed at the 'Hotel Magnificent,' and is supposed to have remained in London about three weeks. Afterwards, evidence was forthcoming to the effect that he was one of the Prussian military attachés in the United States, who was engaged upon Secret Service work. Two days ago rumours reached me that this man was once again in England; and the very reason I was late here to-night is that I was first obliged to go to the 'Magnificent,' where I learned that Valentine had left not

an hour before. Take my word for it, this fellow is von Essling."

"And he has gone to Edinburgh?" asked Jimmy.

"Not a bit of it!" said Etheridge. "It is no more likely he would tell a charwoman his destination than his real name and business. He has gone to Liverpool; and that's all the more probable since the 'Baltic' sails early to-morrow morning."

"Thunder!" cried Crouch. "This is a greater game than big-game shooting in the Sunderbunds. I never in my life picked up a spoor like this."

"One thing's a certainty," said Etheridge; "I leave for Liverpool without delay. There's no fast train till morning; but I can get there in an eighty horse-power car. But, first, you must both come with me to the Admiralty. Jarvis," he added, turning to one of the policemen, "don't forget to drop into the White Star offices to-morrow morning, and tell them there's no fear this voyage that the 'Baltic' will be torpedoed."

# CHAPTER XX--Commander Fells

For reasons which are usually described as having regard to the public interest, and also because of the Censorship in war-time, it is not possible to relate in any detail the interview that took place between Jimmy Burke and Captain Crouch and a certain Admiralty official, who may as well be called the Director-in-Chief of the Naval Secret Service.

This gentleman--by name Commander Fells--knew the superintendent-detective as well as any of his own immediate subordinates. Though it was by then past ten o'clock at night, they found him in his office, hard at work. Though he wore the uniform of a naval officer with the three gold stripes of his rank on either sleeve, his was the pale careworn face of a man who works at a desk--moreover, for long hours of the night.

Etheridge stayed no longer than was necessary to introduce Crouch and Jimmy, and to explain the important business upon which they desired to see Commander Fells. The detective then took his departure in haste on being told that the enormous Rolls-Royce car for which he had telephoned to Scotland Yard

was waiting for him in Whitehall, outside the iron gates that guard the entrance of the Admiralty.

Alone with his visitors, the Commander lay back in his chair, and closing one eye, looked hard at Jimmy with the other. A little later, he twisted round sideways, so that his elbow rested on the back of the chair--a position that enabled him with comfort to bite the end of his thumb--a habit not to be encouraged in those who are still at school, but excusable no doubt (for the sake of Empire) in Commander Fells. A singular thing in this man, who was undoubtedly one of the powers-that-be in the Navy, was that he wore no medal ribbons on the left side of his coat, the sole decoration with which he had ever been honoured being the plain blue medal of the Royal Humane Society for saving life at sea.

There were a great many things he wanted to know. His method was quite different from that of the Scotland Yard detective who had cross-examined the two witnesses earlier in the evening. Whereas Etheridge asked an infinity of questions, the Commander simply requested Jimmy, and then Captain Crouch, to tell him all they knew. When he had heard both stories, had seen a copy of the cypher message, and turned up von Essling's name in a Prussian Court directory, he got to his feet and walked quickly out of the room. He returned in about an hour, saying that he had talked the matter out with an exceedingly high official (whom it would not be possible to mention). He asked a few more questions concerning Rosencrantz, and Rudolf Stork, and then turned to Crouch.

"You must understand," said he, "that in a matter like this absolute secrecy is necessary. From the moment you leave this building, you are not to breathe a single word of what you know to any one. For all that, we are exceedingly grateful for the information you and your young friend have brought."

"The Grand Fleet, sir, will be warned?" asked Crouch.

The Commander bowed his head.

"That has been done already," said he. "Five minutes after I left you--that is to say an hour ago--Sir John Jellicoe was made acquainted with the possibilities of the raid. Torpedo-boat-destroyers were warned to keep a sharp look-out for German submarines in the vicinity of the Well-bank light-ship. You say that this man Stork means to put to sea in a smack called the 'Marigold'?"

"That's so," said Crouch. "And if you have no objection, I should like to make a suggestion?"

"By all means," said the other.

"I may not look it," Crouch went on, "but I'm a sea-faring man by trade, though I have spent half my life knocking about on land. At one time--when I was little more than a boy--I went to sea on a trawler. I know the North Sea as well as any smacksman, and it so happens that the part I know best is this same Well-bank, where the U93 is supposed to be. And now, sir, here's the point;

I've an old score to pay with Rudolf Stork; he's fooled me twice already, and if ever he does it again, this foot of mine's not cork. I know every fathom of the Dogger Bank, and I ask nothing better than leave to go to sea, and run down the 'Marigold.'"

"Good!" exclaimed the Commander, slapping Crouch on the back, "you shall have your wish and a 'permit' to see you through. It's hardly likely that we should stand in your way when you want to do no more than help us."

Though the one was an officer in the Royal Navy and the other no more than an honest merchant captain, there is--as we have said before--a kind of bond that binds all men together who learn to read the face of Nature in the changing aspects of the sea. As the oceans are wide and the seas many, so do all sailors who leave port under the red or the white ensign belong to a great brotherhood that lives one life, whether it be in ward-room, in gun-room, or in stokehold, that runs the same risks and faces the same cold and tragic death, for the honour and good name of that same old England that centuries ago ousted the Don from the Spanish Main and carried the British flag from Pole to Pole. There was this in common--though they never thought it--between Captain Crouch and Commander Fells, R.N.

It was long after midnight when Crouch and Jimmy Burke left the Admiralty. By then, they had received the most minute instructions as to what they were to do; they had also been supplied with a certain amount of money from the Secret Service funds, as well as a railway warrant and a roll of Admiralty charts.

Before daybreak they were travelling northward. In undisputed possession of a first-class carriage, they made themselves as comfortable as they could, and having been assured by the guard that he would wake them up before they reached their destination, they were soon fast asleep.

Captain Crouch was able to sleep like a dog. All his life he had been accustomed to drop off whenever he wished to, for an hour or so, or sometimes only for a few minutes at a time. It was probably because of this that he had retained well into middle age much of the vitality and enthusiasm of youth. In spite of the fact that his hair was touched with grey and inclined to thinness on the crown, in spite of all the hardships and privations he had undergone, Crouch, for all practical purposes, may be regarded as a young man. He now gave an exhibition of the extreme simplicity of going to sleep at will. He took off his coat--which he rolled round his white bowler hat--in order to make a pillow--wrapped himself in a tartan rug he had bought that afternoon, curled himself up like a hedgehog, wished Jimmy good-night, and a moment later was snoring like a pig.

Jimmy's case was altogether different. Young though he was, he found that on such an occasion as this sleep was no easy matter. Unlike the little sea-captain, his had not been a life of adventure and excitement. Never in his wildest dreams

had he thought it possible that he personally would take part in so tremendous an undertaking.

The whole thing was amazing. The Scotland Yard detective had appeared to have little or no doubt that "Valentine" was the Baron von Essling himself. It was, indeed, quite possible. Von Essling had told Rosencrantz that, in all probability, he would visit England, and he may have done so at the time of the outbreak of war. Also, there was nothing to prevent him repeating his visits, disguised and under an assumed name, as often as he liked. In these days of quick travelling, the journey across the Atlantic seldom occupies longer than seven days.

The secrecy with which the whole plot had been laid, and the care with which every detail had been considered, spoke volumes for German efficiency and organization. No one in London--least of all in the Edgware Road itself--had thought for a moment that the large block of untenanted flats had been purchased outright by the German Government, in order to be used as the headquarters of a gang of spies. The military attaché went about his business in Washington, the capital of the United States, and no shred of suspicion rested upon himself. Nothing had been overlooked. German agents had been found in Hull; and a fishing smack, the "Marigold," was able to put out from an English port and patrol the high seas on behalf of the German Navy, which dared not show its face within range of the great fifteen-inch guns of the British super-Dreadnoughts. Stork had been specially selected for work of a singularly dangerous character, and there was little doubt that his services would prove of inestimable value to those who controlled the destiny of the most formidable nation in arms that any country has ever been called upon to face. But, perhaps, the most remarkable thing of all was that the whole plot should have been discovered as it seemed by a mere stroke of luck. Had it not been for the particular gust of wind--a little eddy in the air, in mid-Atlantic, hundreds of miles from the nearest land--that blew Stork's cypher message back upon the deck, nothing would have been found out, and the Secret Service Department in the Wilhelmstrasse of Berlin would have been able to carry out their plans unimpeded.

It was such thoughts as these that kept Jimmy Burke awake. And when, at last, he fell asleep, it was to dream in a vague disjointed way of Rosencrantz and Rudolf Stork, the thunder of the "Dresden's" guns, and the silent, shadowy form of the U93, gliding northward to the fog-soaked Dogger Bank.

How long he had actually been asleep he never had the least idea, when the door of the railway carriage was thrown open, and the guard seized both Crouch and Jimmy by the shoulders and shook them to wake them up.

"Here you are, sir! This is Hull."

Jimmy sat up and rubbed his eyes. It was broad daylight and bitterly cold. The few passengers and railway servants that were to be seen upon the platform

were all enwrapped in mufflers and overcoats.

Crouch sprang to his feet, cast aside his tartan rug, and jammed his battered white bowler on to the back of his head.

"Come on!" he cried. "If Stork's here, there's no time to lose."

# CHAPTER XXI--On Board a White Star Liner

Whilst Jimmy and Crouch were travelling at the rate of about forty miles an hour upon the track of the Great Northern Railway, Superintendent-detective Etheridge was traversing the country every bit as rapidly, upon an almost parallel route.

Leaving Whitehall shortly after ten o'clock at night, he followed the old Roman road which goes by the name of Watling Street that runs from London to Chester. He knew what he was about; and he knew also that, provided the Rolls-Royce car met with no mishap upon the road, he could reach Liverpool before the "Baltic" sailed. He had already telegraphed to the police both at that place and at Hull, giving a detailed description of "Mr. Lewis Valentine" and Rudolf Stork. It was discovered afterwards--and we have already said as much--that his telegram reached Hull too late. Stork, with his usual luck, had arrived in the nick of time, and before Detective-inspector Manning could trace his whereabouts, he had embarked upon the "Marigold," and was well out to sea in one of those dripping, impenetrable fogs, which are of such common occurrence upon the Dogger Bank.

At Liverpool, however, the case was very different. The police in that city were warned in time; and besides, it so happened that the boat-train was delayed by the breaking down of an engine which obstructed the main-line traffic for several hours. The great White Star liner lay alongside her wharf, under steam, with her cargo all aboard; but, long before the first batch of passengers had arrived, no less than six detectives and plain-clothes policemen were in possession of the gangways. A Mr. Lewis Valentine, registered as an American citizen, of

Minneapolis, appeared in the list of passengers; and the police were already in possession of Etheridge's description of the man he wanted.

In the meantime, the superintendent-detective himself was speeding northward upon the famous road that in bygone days had conducted the Roman legions to the strong fortified posts upon the frontier of Wales. Etheridge knew the possibilities of the Rolls-Royce, which on many a previous occasion had stood him in good stead. It was by means of this car that he had captured Jack White, the famous Ealing murderer, and had been able to run down Joss Hubbard, the anarchist, whose arrest he brought about at the very moment when the criminal was setting foot upon the cross-Channel boat at Dover.

Towards morning, it rained steadily--a fine, drizzling rain which soon after daybreak turned to sleet. Even the main roads were covered with mud and slush, whereas the country lanes were converted into quagmires.

Hour by hour, the Rolls-Royce tore northward. Its great staring lights rushed through many a sleeping village. Its horn sounded repeatedly, giving ample warning to the few people who happened to be abroad--for the most part agricultural labourers going to their work in the small hours of the morning--that one of His Majesty's servants had urgent and important business to transact on behalf of the public safety.

In such a situation there was nothing novel as far as the superintendent-detective was concerned. He knew exactly where he was going, when he would get there, and what would--or what would not--happen, when he did. Accordingly, he folded his arms, turned up the collar of his fur coat, and lying well back in his seat, slept no less soundly, though not quite so noisily, as Captain Crouch himself.

He woke up as the car was entering Liverpool, pulled out his watch, and looked at the time. He had still three-quarters of an hour to spare; he would arrive on board the "Baltic" before she was due to sail.

Leaving the Rolls-Royce at the dock gates, he walked along the magnificent wharf owned by the White Star Company, where at the foot of the gangway he was recognized by one of the local detectives. Though no one, watching the two men's faces, would have imagined for a single instant that they had known each other for years, Etheridge gathered all the information he desired: namely, that the so-called "Mr. Valentine" had not yet come on board.

He ascended the gangway to the main promenade deck, where, cigar in mouth, he leaned upon the taffrail, surveying the crowd of dock labourers, customs house officials and passengers that was assembled under the wharf-shed.

Presently, a tall man approached who was wearing a heavy ulster, and who addressed Etheridge as if he were talking to an absolute stranger, though as a matter of fact he was no less a person than Superintendent-detective McGowan

of Liverpool who had worked with Scotland Yard for years.

"I beg pardon, sir," said he, producing a cigarette from a morocco case, "but would you be so good as to oblige me with a light?"

Etheridge rummaged in his pockets, produced a box of safety matches, struck one, and held it in the hollow of both hands to screen the flame from the wind. When he was quite assured that the light would not be blown out, he leaned forward so that McGowan was not only able to light his cigarette, but to whisper in his colleague's ear. The words he used may, at first blush, seem somewhat vague; for all that, to the quick intelligence of the London detective they conveyed all the information he desired to know.

"D Forty-one," said McGowan, who then, having lighted his cigarette, thanked Etheridge, and strolled carelessly away.

Etheridge walked casually along the deck until he came to one of the lifts, where he asked the attendant to take him down to "D" deck. There, as if looking for his own cabin, he wandered about, until he came to number forty-one, which he promptly entered and where he seated himself in a comfortable armchair.

Then, producing a copy of the morning paper which he had purchased at the dock gates, he proceeded to read the news of the day. About the Baron von Essling he troubled himself not in the least. He never gave him a thought. He had gathered from McGowan that D41 was the number of the cabin that had been booked by "Mr. Valentine." Sooner or later, Valentine himself would arrive. Until that moment, Superintendent-detective Etheridge was determined to give the whole of his attention to the morning's news.

Suddenly, a steward entered, carrying a Gladstone bag. He appeared somewhat surprised to see the cabin in possession of the detective, of whose identity he had no idea.

"This is the wrong cabin, sir," said he.

"I think not," said the other. "It has been booked by a Mr. Valentine, I believe. I have here a police warrant for his arrest."

The usual effect of a police warrant can only be described as electrical. The steward allowed the Gladstone bag to fall from his hand, and stood regarding the detective in amazement.

"What shall I do?" he asked.

"Mr. Valentine has come on board?" asked Etheridge, disregarding the steward's question.

"He is on the promenade deck now."

"Then show him down to his cabin, and leave us together. You need not trouble to remain at hand, as several of my assistants are on board the ship, and besides, I am provided with these," he added, producing a Colt revolver and a pair of handcuffs.

The steward went out, walking on tiptoe, with the demeanour of a man who is conscious that he finds himself on dangerous ground. And no sooner was the door closed than Etheridge flung himself at the Gladstone bag as a hungry dog might tackle a bone. To undo the straps was the work of a moment. Producing a skeleton key from his pocket, he succeeded in opening the lock, and then turned out the complete contents of the bag upon the floor.

He found nothing more suspicious than a suit of pyjamas, washing materials and an extraordinary number of neckties of every conceivable colour, tone and shade. He bundled these back into the bag with scant ceremony; and no sooner had he done so than the door was opened, and there entered a man wearing a tweed suit and one of those soft felt hats which are so popular in the United States.

"I understood," said he, regarding Etheridge in surprise, "I understood this was my cabin--D41."

At that moment, there entered another steward--a thick-set man with a heavy, black moustache--who carried upon his back a large cabin-trunk, upon the lid of which were inscribed the words: "LEWIS N. VALENTINE, MINNEAPOLIS, MINN."

Now, Superintendent-detective Etheridge had already searched the archives of Scotland Yard for a photograph of von Essling; and there was no question but that this Mr. Lewis N. Valentine (of Minneapolis, Minn.) bore a striking resemblance to the military attaché, with the exception of the trifling fact that von Essling wore a moustache and Valentine was clean-shaven.

The steward set down the trunk in the middle of the cabin, and then went out without a word, half closing the door. Etheridge and Valentine stood face to face, regarding each other closely, the one wondering whether he had found the right man, the suspicions of the other fully aroused.

Etheridge had a method of his own that seldom failed. It was his custom to confront suspected persons with the truth. On such occasions, it is extremely difficult not to give one's self away; the most hardened criminal is not capable of controlling his features or of finding suitable words of explanation, when he suddenly finds himself face to face with his own guilt. If "Valentine," or von Essling, were so obliging as to betray his own identity, there was little doubt in the detective's mind that the necessary proof would be forthcoming, when the man's baggage was overhauled. However--as we shall see--Valentine himself was possessed of considerable presence of mind. He was a desperate man in a desperate situation, and was not likely to stick at trifles.

"To the best of my knowledge," said Etheridge bluntly, "this cabin was reserved for the Baron von Essling, a military attaché to the German Embassy in Washington, who has certainly no right to be in England at the present time."

Valentine started. He was not sufficiently master of himself to prevent it.

He drew back a quick step, and stared hard at Etheridge. His lips had parted, and the colour had vanished from his cheeks.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

He got the better of his feelings in an instant, and feigned annoyance. Etheridge, however, had already formed his own opinion, and was determined to arrest the man, at once.

"If you're wise," said he, "you'll speak the truth. It's my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence against you."

Very quietly, without ostentation or any show of violence, Valentine drew a revolver from the hip pocket of his trousers, and directed the barrel fair at the detective's heart.

"Hands up!" said he, almost in a whisper.

With an air of meekness and submission that was little short of amazing, the superintendent-detective raised both hands above his head.

Valentine spoke again, this time more quickly, as if he were excited.

"Who you are," he cried, "I neither know nor care. But attempt to betray me, attempt to leave this room until we have come to some mutual understanding, and you do so at your peril. How you discovered my identity, I don't pretend to know."

"Then," said Etheridge, whose hands were still held high above his head, "then, you admit that you are von Essling."

"I admit nothing," rapped out the other.

"You have already done so," answered the detective. "And that is enough for me."

And hardly had the words left his lips than Valentine was seized roughly from behind and both arms were pinned to his sides. For a moment, he struggled violently to free himself; and it was then that the revolver went off, and the leaden bullet was driven deep into the flooring. With an effort, he twisted round, to see who his adversary might be; and his disgust and astonishment can better be imagined than described when he found himself confronted by the same white-coated steward--the thick-set man with the black moustache--who had carried his cabin trunk on board. A second later, he was out of action, his hands fastened together behind his back by means of a pair of handcuffs.

"That was smart work, Richards," observed the superintendent-detective, turning to the steward. "I hope you were able to hear every word that passed between us?"

"Every word, sir," said the steward, who, as a matter of fact, was one of the detective's most trusted men, who had accompanied him from London, sitting beside the driver in the eighty horse-power Rolls-Royce car, which had come from Whitehall at the rate of forty miles an hour.

# CHAPTER XXII--By the Dogger Bank

Whilst these events were in progress Captain Crouch and Jimmy Burke, in the great seaport town of Hull, were hot upon the scent of Rudolf Stork.

From the railway station they drove straight to the central police station, where they found the inspector in his office. Scotland Yard had telephoned during the night that Stork would probably arrive in Hull early in the morning. Detectives had been dispatched at once to the railway station, but got there too late to arrest the spy, who was probably the only first-class passenger who arrived by the one forty-seven train from King's Cross, who had no other baggage than a small handbag, and who was met by a motor-car in which he went off in the direction of the docks.

The police had made sundry inquiries among the fishing people in the poorer part of the town, and had learnt that the smack "Marigold" had put to sea in the small hours of the morning.

Crouch saw that there was nothing to be done but to continue the pursuit, even into the midst of the shoals and fog-wreaths of the Dogger Bank. He knew well the maxim that it was wise to set a thief to catch a thief, and decided to follow the "Marigold" in another fishing-smack, and not a steamer.

His reasons for this were twofold. In the first place, the Well-bank was extremely shallow water, across which no ocean-going ship could pass. Secondly, as he knew full well, in view of the forthcoming raid, the neighbouring waters were alive with enemy submarines, who were more likely to torpedo a steamer flying the English flag than a comparatively valueless fishing-boat.

Now, the name of Captain Crouch's friends was legion, but for the most part they lived, moved and had their being in seaport towns, and there were not a few in Hull.

One of these was a Grimsby man, with nearly thirty years' experience as a trawler, who was known as Captain Whisker; and it was to his house that Crouch

and Jimmy Burke betook themselves, as soon as they had gleaned all available information from the police.

Though it was still exceedingly early in the morning Captain Whisker was up, digging furiously in his garden, with a blackened pipe between his lips. He was a man the very opposite of Crouch. Crouch was small and wizened; Whisker broad, florid and colossal. He could not have been less than six feet five in height, and his chest measurement was exceeded only by the girth of his waist. He was clean-shaven, but his eyebrows were so extremely large and bushy that they resembled a kind of superior moustache, and made his surname of "Whisker" seem singularly appropriate.

"Why, Crouch!" he exclaimed, driving his garden fork into the ground and coming forward with outstretched hand. "The last man on earth I ever thought to see! It must be five years, at least, since you and I were shipmates; and that was on the West Coast, when I took you down from Sierra Leone to Banana Point, when you were bound for the Aruwimi, to look for a lost explorer who, you said, was a good two inches taller than I."

"There's no time now to talk of that," said Crouch. "I've a job of work on hand, and you're the very man who can help. There's a German spy who put to sea at daybreak in the 'Marigold,' and I've a mind to go after him, if you know of a craft that can be safely recommended."

Captain Whisker drew himself up to his full height and puffed out both his cheeks, at the same time opening his blue eyes so widely that they resembled those of an enormous doll.

"Come inside," said he, almost in a whisper, after a pause sufficiently long to enable him to recover from his surprise. "Come inside, and talk matters out."

Crouch and Jimmy followed the burly captain into a very singular room, in which a hammock was suspended from the ceiling, whilst the floor was wholly taken up by fishing-nets, tarpaulins, ropes, boats' anchors, lifebuoys and a hundred odds and ends such as might be picked up on a sheltered beach near which a wreck had taken place. There was barely room in which to move.

Crouch told his story briefly--or as much of it as he deemed it was necessary for his seafaring friend to hear. When he had ended, Captain Whisker unburdened himself as follows--

"You can't do better," said he, "than set out in the 'Kitty McQuaire.' She's a faster smack than the 'Marigold'; she can do a good knot and a half better. I reckon she can sail nearer the wind than any sailing-ship of any kind between here and Aberdeen. She was going out this morning, in any case. I'll come with you, and take command. It's some years, Crouch, since you skippered a smack; and though I don't doubt that you still know as much of your old trade as I do, what you have told me has kind o' hoisted a flying jib before the mainsail of my curiosity; and I

should like to see the business through."

"Come on, then!" Crouch almost shouted. "It won't be the first time, by a long chalk, that you and I were shipmates in adventure. And, what's more, you always brought me luck."

Resolved to waste no further time, they set out together; and long before the sun had reached its meridian, they were passing out of the mouth of the Humber, where they set their course to the north, towards the Well-bank lightship.

The "Kitty McQuaire" proved herself to be all that Whisker had said. As the afternoon advanced the sea got up, until by evening a gale was blowing from the south-east. The smack danced and dived and pirouetted, sometimes being lifted high upon the crest of the waves, and at other times plunging, nose foremost, into the depths.

Captain Whisker soon proved himself no less capable a seaman than Captain Crouch. Indeed, had it not been for his great knowledge of the sea and admirable presence of mind, it is more than likely that the "Kitty McQuaire" would have been driven on to a shoal or foundered in open water. They were obliged to haul down their sails, and keeping the smack head-on to the storm, to put their trust in Providence that they would not be driven back upon the shore.

That night to Jimmy Burke was a night of purgatory and terrible suspense. In the first place, he was unconscionably seasick. What he had endured upon the "Harlech" was as nothing to the torments he suffered now. In a very short time he was reduced to such a state of utter wretchedness that, in his fevered imagination, death by drowning was preferable to life under these conditions. For all that, he was filled with a great fear that the smack would, in truth, go down. Sometimes, when a great wave broke immediately before them, the salt water washed the ship from bows to stern, so that they were obliged to cling to the masts or whatsoever they could lay hold upon, to prevent themselves from being swept away.

In addition to the wind that shrieked and howled through the rigging, a denseness lay upon the uneasy surface of the waters. It was so dark that they could not see twenty yards before them, and knew not in which direction they were being driven by the wind. For some hours they lived in horrible anticipation that they would suddenly find themselves stranded on a sandbank or some lonely part of the coast, where the ship would be battered to fragments by the waves.

With the first signs of daybreak the fog lifted and a great blood-red sun, like an enormous Chinese lantern, arose from out of the east, to flood the desolate scene with a kind of purple-tinted twilight, such as one might suppose should infest a land of ghosts. At the same time, the wind dropped and changed further towards the south. Within two hours the sea had so abated that they were able to hoist their sails and to continue on their course.

Presently they caught sight of the coast, and Whisker recognized at once

the white cliffs of Flamborough Head. They were much further north than they had dared to hope; if the wind continued to be favourable, they would reach the neighbourhood of the Well-bank soon after dark. Jimmy, also, had by midday sufficiently recovered of his seasickness to eat a ship's biscuit so hard that he was obliged to break it with an axe.

Early in the afternoon, since there were several ships in the neighbourhood--fishing-smacks, Government trawlers and steamers from the northern ports--they lowered a net to make a pretence of fishing and to avoid arousing suspicion. It is as well they did so, for soon afterwards they sighted a smack, a mile or so ahead, bearing on the same course as themselves, which Whisker recognized at once as the "Marigold," upon which--it was presumed--was Rudolf Stork.

The wind could not have been more favourable for their purpose. They were able to hold a straight course, and under full sail to bear right down upon their quarry.

It was not long before the "Marigold" appeared to guess that she was being followed, for her skipper hoisted all the sail the smack could carry, and changed his course a little to the north. By that time the "Kitty McQuaire" was about two miles in rear. The other ships had been left far to the south, with the exception of a large tramp steamer, with a funnel so aft as to appear to proceed from the poop, which was steadily ploughing her way northward, bound possibly for Leith or Inverness.

Though the "Marigold" strained every stitch of sail to widen the distance between herself and her pursuer, it was very soon apparent that she had little chance of escaping. The "Kitty McQuaire" was overtaking her quarry, inch by inch, gaining a yard or so with every gust of wind.

Captain Crouch from the bows of the smack regarded the "Marigold" through a long telescope that belonged to Captain Whisker, and upon which was emblazoned in blood-red letters the name of every ship upon which he had ever sailed. Crouch had already examined the tramp steamer to learn that she was the "Mondavia"--by a strange chance one of the fleet of Jason, Stileman and May, the very house to which Crouch himself belonged.

Suddenly, with a loud cry of triumph, he thrust the telescope into the hands of Jimmy Burke.

"Look there!" he cried. "There's Rudolf Stork, or else I never yet set eyes upon the man! He's got his eyes glued on us through a pair of glasses! There are not more than five men on board, so far as I can see; and there's a strange sort of arrangement aft, which might be anything from a cucumber-frame to a coffin! If we can overtake her before it's dark we'll have the whole gang at the Old Bailey under a week!"

He was wildly excited, as, indeed, he had some cause to be. By all the laws

of chance Stork was as good as captured. It was plain the "Marigold" could not escape, for it still wanted two hours to sunset, and she was making no better headway. It appeared that certain success was well within their grasp. And it was just at this junction that there happened an incident which was at once disastrous and unexpected. The "Marigold" opened fire!

To be fired upon without warning on the high seas by an ordinary fishing-smack is not an event that one might look for; and neither are effective counter-measures possible when one is both unarmed and unprepared. The first shot struck the water ten yards from the "Kitty's" bows, whereas the next whistled high overhead, to plunge into the sea a long way astern. It was apparent that the suspicious arrangement which Crouch had noticed on the deck of the "Marigold" was one of those old-fashioned high-angle muzzle-loading guns which go by the name of mortars. As far as Jimmy Burke could make out with the aid of the telescope, the mortar was covered over with fishing-nets and tackle of all kinds, and Rudolf Stork was directing its fire.

Now the appearance of this new factor in the situation cast at once a very different hue upon the prospects of all concerned. In the first place, these weapons may be of no more use than pea-shooters when brought to bear upon a man-of-war; but one shot below the water-line of the "Kitty McQuaire" would suffice to send her to the bottom. Secondly, though Crouch, Jimmy and Whisker were all armed with revolvers, they had no weapon that was of the slightest value at a range beyond a hundred yards.

None the less, Crouch stoutly refused to give up the chase. He loudly protested that he would overtake the "Marigold" or go down to Davy Jones.

The "Mondavia" was then about four miles to the west, between the "Marigold" and the coast. They had no means of signalling to the steamer, since there was not a flag on board, and though there was a signalling lamp, this was quite useless whilst the daylight lasted.

At length, at the end of about ten minutes, the "Kitty McQuaire" was hit. One of the round projectiles from the mortar struck the mainsail obliquely, so that it tore a great rent that flapped open in the wind. Crouch clenched both fists, and stamped upon the deck.

"Are we to go ahead?" he cried to Jimmy. "Are we to go on with it, or give up the chase?"

"Go on!" cried the boy, who was quite beside himself with excitement. "I don't care what happens. It's too late to go back now."

They were then almost within revolver range of the "Marigold." Crouch went to the bows, and fired three shots in quick succession at the fugitives.

"Heave to, you curs!" he shouted at the full power of his lungs.

It was the voice of Stork that answered.

"Come and take us," he cried in loud derision.

"Do you think we dare not?" answered Jimmy.

Before Stork could answer, Crouch broke in again, telling Stork to blaze away with what he called his "pop-gun" which was not capable of knocking a hole through an empty rain-barrel. These words, in spite of the fact that they were never spoken seriously, were uttered at a most inopportune moment; for, hardly had they left the little captain's lips than a shot struck the starboard quarter of the "Kitty McQuaire" about a foot below the water-line.

Whisker was the first to recognize the danger, and ordered all on board to stand by the hand-pump, which was the only means they had of bailing the ship.

"And even that won't save us," he added in a doleful voice. "She'll fill for a certainty. She'll not take ten minutes to settle down."

The alarming truth of this was at once wholly apparent. Within the space of a few minutes, the "Kitty McQuaire" took on a decided list. At the same time, she slowed down; every second, the "Marigold" widened the distance between herself and her pursuer. As they lowered the sails, they heard Stork's loud, boisterous laugh, as the man looked back upon the sinking ship upon the deck of which his victims stood in silence, side by side.

Indeed, Crouch and his companions were face to face with inevitable destruction. Though the storm had subsided, the sea was still too rough to launch the only small boat the "Kitty" carried. This was a small dinghy used for harbour work, which could neither carry all who were on board nor live for two minutes in such a sea without being swamped.

The "Kitty McQuaire" was sinking slowly by the bows, turning over quite gently--like a tired beast that lies down to sleep. The deck was now so much aslant that they were obliged to hold fast to the masts and rigging, to prevent themselves slipping down, one after the other, into the cold, hungry sea.

The sun, at last, was setting. Darkness was spreading from the east; and at the same time, a lowering mass of cloud was drifting forward on the wind which presently would shut out the starlight and the moon.

There is no situation more terrible, there is nothing that requires greater fortitude to bear, than to find oneself doomed and deserted upon the unutterable loneliness of the sea, as the sun sinks in the sky and the mists of twilight glide upon the surface of the waters. There was no help for it; they knew that they must die. At such an hour, it was but human nature that their thoughts should turn to the God Who had given them life. Each man closed his eyes; and standing together, clinging to the last of the sinking ship, one and all prayed silently and swiftly that death might be easy, and that the wrong they had done in their lives should be forgiven.

And then, as if to make their lot more hard, the cruelty of their end more

bitter, within a hundred feet of the fishing-smack, silhouetted against the red glow of a winter's sunset, there arose from out of the water, the shark-like, threatening form of the U93.

[image]

*AS THEY SANK OUT OF THE RED GLARE OF A WINTER'S SUNSET THERE APPEARED THE THREATENING FORM OF THE U93.*

# CHAPTER XXIII--The Loss of the "Kitty McQuaire"

The submarine had made its appearance quite suddenly, rising in silence to the surface of the water, where the waves broke against the superstructure, which was presently the centre of a white circle of foam. A little afterwards, the figures of two men appeared upon the conning-tower, one of whom Jimmy Burke recognized immediately as the German officer who had hailed the "Harlech," and whom he had followed to the engine-room of the deserted ship.

There was something almost uncanny in the thought that this dreaded submarine monster had travelled northward all the way from the Lizard, evading the Allied destroyers which thronged the Channel and the Straits of Dover, steering amid the shoals and shallows of the Goodwin Sands, passing under water in all probability often within a stone's throw of His Majesty's ships guarding the shores of England.

Of all craft that put to sea, the modern submarine is the most formidable, inasmuch as it seems gifted with an intelligence of its own. It is an invention so highly organized and delicately equipped, its capabilities are so marvellous, its possibilities so great, that it is not difficult to imagine it even possessed of a kind of consciousness of its own. As a matter of fact, it is no more than a perfectly complete machine which--after the manner of all machinery--answers to the will of its

commander. When that commander is ruthless and pitiless, when his orders are to wage war upon innocent men, women and children, to show neither gallantry nor clemency to whomsoever may fall into his clutches, then a submarine--such as the U93--becomes the shark, the ship of prey, among the navies of the world.

The "Kitty McQuaire" was sinking fast by the bows. In the red sunset--the last of a dying day--she had not ten minutes in which to live; and yet, faced with such a tragedy, with the spectacle of so many men so indubitably doomed, the commander of the U93 threw back his head, and laughed.

His voice sounded false and fiendish amid the soft, rhythmic washing of the waves. It was the laugh of a coward in his hour of triumph; for there can be no true courage which does not go hand in hand with clemency and generosity. Assuredly, the kindness of the seas, the sense of gallantry that led Nelson's sailors to risk their lives so often in saving their drowning foes, does not extend to all. The German Navy is a thing of yesterday; and it had been better for the honour of the Fatherland had German naval officers and seamen learnt something more of the glorious traditions that British sailors honour and respect. It was not enough to copy the latest type of British super-Dreadnought or battle-cruiser. There is no such thing as a seaman without a sailor's heart.

The man's laugh died away in the distance, as the submarine raced after the "Marigold," which was now almost a mile ahead. The U93 had made her intentions perfectly clear in the brutal laugh of her commander. She was in no way disposed to hold out a helping hand to enemies in distress. Captain Crouch and his friends on board the sinking fishing-boat could be safely left to drown like rats. Their lives had been a menace to the German Empire; Crouch, in his own small way, was one of those who had stood between Germany and the sun. It was as well that they should be thrown upon the mercy of the sea, to swim at random, desperate, until great fatigue and a sense of their own helplessness should weigh them down, to sink, one by one. The U93 followed in the wake of the "Marigold," which had heaved-to, and from which a signalling lamp was now throwing out its dots and dashes in the twilight.

Crouch turned to Captain Whisker. They were clinging, side by side, to an iron bollard fastened to the deck; for the smack was leaning over so that her deck sloped like the roof of a house.

"How long do you give her?" he asked.

"Three minutes more, perhaps. She may dive on a sudden, or she may settle down quite quietly. They sometimes do, as you know as well as I."

They remained silent for some moments, both staring hard at a certain fixed point in the midst of the gathering darkness. Here, like a small star, a red light suddenly shone out; and as they looked, a white light appeared, higher up and in front of the red one, and then higher still, another, so that all three together

formed an isosceles triangle.

"There's the 'Mondavia'!" said Crouch. "I know the skipper well--a man called Cookson, who once sailed with me to Melbourne. As a last hope, I'll try to pick her up."

He asked for the signalling lamp, lit up, and raised and closed the shutter to see that it was in working order. Whilst Crouch was so employed, Captain Whisker gave his final instructions. Every man was ordered to put on his lifebelt; several spars were loosened, and left upon the deck, so that when the boat went down they would float. As soon as the "Kitty" foundered, the men were to take to the sea, where they could cling to the floating spars. They were warned, however, to avoid the dinghy, which would prove nothing but a death-trap.

Seeing that their chances of ultimate salvation were very small, all these instructions and precautions must appear somewhat unnecessary and useless. It is, however, a natural instinct for men to cling to life. Life is held to be so precious, and death so gloomy and uncertain, that no sane man of his own free will can bring himself to take the first step that leads to the Great Unknown. These rough seamen of the Yorkshire coast thought of the wives and children that they would leave behind in Hull and Grimsby, and such thoughts are enough in themselves to lend strength and courage to the last. In grim silence, they set to work following the skipper's instructions, fastening their lifebelts around their waists, still clinging to the ship that was now in such desperate plight that the forward part was almost entirely under water.

Captain Crouch, holding with one hand to the tiller, used the other to work the signalling lamp, the face of which was directed towards the "Mondavia." Darkness had now set in; neither the "Marigold" nor the U93 was to be seen, and of the tramp steamer nothing was visible but the two masthead lights and the red light on the port quarter.

Suddenly, Jimmy Burke--who had never left the side of his good friend, Captain Crouch--let out a loud cry, and pointed excitedly towards the Jason steamer.

"Look there!" he exclaimed. "She has seen our light. She's swinging round."

All eyes were turned towards the west. In the half-light, the men were just able to discern the faces of their comrades, and everywhere were the same emotions legible: hopelessness, pity for those who would be left without support, bitterness at the harshness of their fate, and a set determination to die like British seamen. They looked in the direction indicated with hungry, sorrowful eyes, as if each knew only too well in his heart that help was so far away that it was sheer folly to think of it at all.

None the less, they could not dispute the evidence of what they saw. Even as they looked, the lights of the steamer swung round, so that the two white lights appeared in the same vertical plane, the one above the other. The red light also

grew smaller and less distinct, and at the same time a green light appeared on the same level as the red.

To anyone who had the smallest knowledge of the sea, there can be no mistaking signs so manifest. The "Mondavia," which hitherto had shown her port light to the east, had now changed her course, and was making straight for the sinking boat. Though there was no necessity to explain to sea-faring men exactly what had happened, Captain Whisker seized the opportunity to speak words of courage to his men.

"Bear up, my lads," he cried. "She has sighted us; you may be sure of that."

"She'll reach us in time?" asked Jimmy.

"There's no chance of it," answered the burly captain. Then on a sudden, his voice became much louder, as he struck a note of alarm. "She's going, now!" he cried. "Take to the water, lads; and each man for himself!"

As he said the words, he threw off his coat, waistcoat, and his long gum-boots, and plunged headforemost into the sea.

The "Kitty McQuaire" had run her course; her days of usefulness were ended. As all honest ships--and, indeed, all honest men--are some day bound to do, she had come to the Parting of the Ways. She had been a good craft in her time, as Captain Whisker himself could testify; and she went down into the depths gently and silently, as if she welcomed an eternity of rest.

And there remained upon the troubled surface of the water, now lifted high upon the crest of rolling waves, now buried in the wide trenches of the sea, the black forms of the heads and shoulders of a dozen struggling men.

The majority of these had gone into the water clinging to the loose spars by means of which they hoped to save themselves from drowning. They were all strong swimmers; and, moreover, with their cork lifebelts, it was hardly possible for them to die until the icy coldness of the water had chilled them to the bone.

As chance had it, Jimmy Burke found himself clinging to the same piece of wreckage as both Captain Crouch and the burly skipper. This was a big iron-ringed boom which--though it floated--was too heavy to rise to the top of the waves that swept over it in quick succession. Hence, it was all that they could do to retain their hold, and neither would they have succeeded in this had it not been that a rope was attached along the entire length of the spar.

How long they remained in this desperate situation not one of them was afterwards able to say. The water was bitterly cold; it was as if they were being frozen to death, and were dying from the feet upwards. Before long they had lost all power of sensation. They did not speak to one another, nor were they so foolish as to try to. Every few seconds a great wave swept over them, and they were buried in the sea, sometimes as much as three fathoms deep. At such times, there was a rushing in their ears--a great sound like a multitude of cataracts; and then,

gasping, breathless, with but little of life remaining to them, they emerged once more upon the surface, to behold the dim starlight, a pale, dying moon screened by a mist, and the great rolling sea on every side.

Quite suddenly, the loud siren of the steamer sounded near at hand. It was as if the noise was within their very ears. They had no means of answering; there was not one who had strength enough to shout. They could only wait, half-frozen and altogether desperate, trusting to Providence that they would be discovered in the midst of the illimitable darkness.

It was Providence, indeed, that came to their aid, that brought the "Mondavia" to the very place where they were struggling for their lives; otherwise, they could never have been found. There was no searchlight on board the ship, and the sea was still so rough that, even had it been broad daylight, they would have been hidden by the waves.

The captain of the "Mondavia" had done all that was in his power; he had ordered every cabin and deck lamp to be lighted, so that in the darkness the old sea-going tramp was like a liner, with every porthole shining, brilliantly illumined.

And no sooner did this great blaze of light stand forth before those who were struggling in the sea than, as one man, they threw themselves from the spars to which they had been clinging and struck out towards the ship. The gangway had been lowered, as well as every rope ladder that the "Mondavia" had on board; and it was Jimmy Burke himself who was the first to know that he was saved.

Dripping, aching in every limb, so numbed that he could not stand upright, he crawled to the main-deck, and there fell, speechless and coiled up, with his knees drawn to his chin.

There was no need for him to speak. His very presence there was direct evidence of all that the captain of the steamer wished to know. On the instant, the engine-room bell rang down for the ship to "stop," and then "half-speed astern"; and--as nearly as she could--she remained stationary, rolling on the heavy swell that still moved the sea.

One after the other, those drenched, frozen and half-suffocated men dragged themselves on board; and of them all, Captain Crouch was the only one who had the ability either to move or find his voice. He was a man so inured to hardship and so wiry that it was as if his vitality was endless. He sat up and looked about him, and then slowly counted with a finger the number of the drenched and motionless figures that lay in the lamplight on the deck.

"Bluffed!" he cried. "Bluffed, as by a miracle! There's not a man missing. The cowards might as well have tried to drown a shoal of mackerel." Then, on a sudden, he seized the pockets of his coat.

"Thunder!" he uttered, in tones of mingled mortification and rage. "Thunder, I've lost my favourite pipe!"

Captain Cookson of the "Mondavia" was staring at him in amazement, after the manner of one who beholds a ghost. Then, seizing Crouch by both shoulders, he shook him so violently that the salt water flew from off him as from a dog on a river bank.

"It's Crouch!" he cried. "It's Crouch!"

"The same man," said Captain Crouch, holding out a wet, ice-cold hand. "The same man, Cookson, but without his favourite pipe."

# CHAPTER XXIV--The Tables Turned

In all probability, there was not one of these men who had not been shipwrecked before. They were fishermen by trade, who earned their living at the peril of their lives amid the fogs and shoals of the Dogger Bank. Their forefathers had followed the same calling for generation after generation; and in consequence, this race of hardy men had been bred on the principle of the survival of the fittest. They had become strong, brave and skilful. The sea was at once their natural element and the mother of them all, who gave her gifts unsparingly, but who ever and anon strove to betray and to destroy.

In the warmth of the stokeholds of the "Mondavia," before the opened doors of blazing furnaces, these half-perished men rapidly revived. They were provided with dry clothes; and those who wished it were given a tot of rum.

In the meantime, Captain Crouch, habited once again in the clothes that became him best of all--a rough pea-jacket and a pair of slacks--was seated in Captain Cookson's cabin, with a borrowed pipe between his lips.

Word by word, from the very day when he had set sail from New York with his orders from Mr. Jason, Junior, he told the whole of his story, concealing nothing, neither the details of how he himself had been fooled, the marked gallantry of Jimmy Burke, nor the full perfidy of Stork.

"It's a strange tale," said Captain Cookson, folding his arms and staring hard at Jimmy, who was sound asleep in his bunk. "It's a strange tale; and from the lips of any man but you, Crouch, I should never believe a word of it."

"I don't care a rap," said Crouch, "whether you believe it or not. The point is, you must do what I tell you, or--if you like--give over the command of the ship to me. You've served as my first mate once; I see no reason why you should not do it again."

"And I see every reason," said the other. "In the first place, I've my own orders, which are to take my cargo to Leith. In the second place, though you may be senior to me, and you're a man for whom I have always had a most sincere respect, this ship happens to be under my command, as the papers I carry will prove. I can't shirk my responsibilities, nor do I mean to."

"That's the right spirit!" cried Captain Crouch. "I'm proud to be your friend. And meanwhile, this pipe don't draw, and your tobacco has no more taste than a pinch of hay."

"Then why smoke it?" asked the other with a smile.

"Because," said Crouch, "as far as a man's brain-box is concerned, tobacco acts like steam in an engine-room. It's the motive power, so to speak, if you manage to follow my meaning. Without steam, there's no use in a boiler, a connecting-rod or a shaft. Without tobacco smoke, there's no use in the convolutions of the human brain. That's how it is with me; though I'm bound to confess I can't, as you might call it, get much steam up with a brand of fuel like this."

"It costs fourpence an ounce," said Captain Cookson.

"And that's more than I ever paid for Bull's Eye Shag," said Crouch. "I wouldn't use this stuff to smoke out a wasps' nest. What do you call it--School Girls' Mixture, Fairy Footsteps or some such name as that?"

"No. Navy Cut," said the other.

"And that's an insult to the Royal Navy," answered Crouch. "I reckon a sober-minded British man-o'-war's man wouldn't give it to his youngest baby to chew. If Lord Nelson had smoked a tobacco like that, he'd never have won the Battle of Trafalgar."

"Look here," said Captain Cookson, who had come to the end of his patience; "all I've got to say is this: if you don't like my 'baccy, don't smoke it."

"I won't," said Crouch.

And at that, without any more ado, he hurled the pipe out of the porthole into the sea.

"My favourite pipe!" cried Cookson, springing to his feet.

"That's your misfortune," answered Crouch. "And after all, you're in no worse luck than I am. Still, we waste time, when there is much of importance to discuss. Whether you or I command this ship matters no more than the two buttons on the back of the frock coat of a shopwalker. I and my friends set out in the 'Kitty McQuaire' to run down the 'Marigold,' and we've been hoist on our own petard--as the saying goes. For all that, I'm not disposed to give up the chase. As

soon as day breaks, we should sight the fishing-smack with Stork on board; and it's my suggestion that, counting the pop-gun she carries for nothing, we run her down, and serve all on board in the way they treated us."

"You forget the submarine," said Captain Cookson.

"I forget nothing of the sort," said Captain Crouch. "I'm ready enough to take what risks there are."

Cookson thrust both hands deep into his trousers pockets, and strode to and fro in his little cabin. For some moments, he seemed to be deep in thought. Then, at last, his mind made up, he approached his old shipmate, and held out a weather-beaten, horny hand.

"I'm with you, Crouch," said he. "I'm with you, come what may."

Crouch rose to his feet, at the same time bringing the fist of one hand into the opened palm of the other, with a gesture suggestive of the utmost satisfaction.

"Good!" he cried. "There's three men on board who won't be baulked by anything--three men who have sailed the seas together for the greater part of their lives. And there's the boy, too--a rare lad, as I promise you, who knows no more of fear than I about keeping bees. Whisker's in a bad way just at present, but he'll pull round long before morning. He was never born to be drowned; and for the matter of that, neither were you or I."

In spite of the dangers that the morrow was almost certain to bring forth, in spite of the immediate presence of so formidable an adversary as the U93, these two merchant captains--men who had spent the best of their years in facing the manifold dangers of the sea, in every quarter of the globe--laid them down to sleep, as if nothing unusual had occurred, or was likely to occur. Captain Crouch snored lustily; whereas Captain Cookson appeared perfectly comfortable stretched at full length upon the floor, with a rolled-up overcoat doing duty for a pillow.

Jimmy, in the meantime, slept the sleep of pure exhaustion on the comfortable bunk in Captain Cookson's cabin. Soon after his rescue, he had been given some hot soup; and almost immediately after drinking it, he had dropped off into a heavy slumber, from which he did not awake until the first signs of daybreak were far spread upon the eastern skyline.

The first thing he saw was the lean, wiry figure of Crouch, standing in the open doorway, with a large telescope under his arm. On the one side of Crouch was Cookson; on the other, Whisker, who seemed more bulky, more huge than ever, since his great form was silhouetted against the half-light of approaching day.

"That's her, right enough," Captain Crouch was saying. "That's the 'Marigold' that we came out of Hull to look for; and on board of her there's the greatest villain that ever tied a reef-knot or a bowline in a bight."

Jimmy sprang out of bed, and hastily dressed in a suit of seaman's clothes which he found laid out upon a chair. A moment later he was on the main-deck with the three merchant captains, who had come to some sort of mutual understanding that they should command the ship together. They formed a kind of triumvirate, wherein the knowledge, experience and powers of initiative of each were combined and amplified.

Crouch turned to Jimmy, and asked him if he had recovered from the trying ordeal of the previous day. The boy answered that he felt no ill effects; whereat Crouch laughed, and slapped Whisker on the back.

"Here's seventeen stone," said he, "that can no more sink in salt water than a corked-up, empty bottle. Mark my words, my boy, we were not saved as we were at the eleventh hour for nothing. It doesn't do to count your chickens afore they're hatched, but Rudolf Stork's not seen the last of us yet."

Meanwhile, Cookson had run up the bridge steps, where he called both his brother captains and Jimmy to his side.

"There's something suspicious about that smack," said he. "She's got no sail up; I can see no one on board. She's lying just as if she was at anchor."

The daylight was now spreading fast. Already the sun was rising. They were drawing quite near to the "Marigold," which--as Captain Cookson had pointed out--appeared to be deserted and riding lazily at anchor.

As we know, it had been Crouch's intention to run the smack down, to send her to the bottom. Such a light craft would stand but a small chance in a direct collision between herself and the heavy ocean tramp.

However, as they drew near to the "Marigold," it became apparent that once again they had been foiled by Rudolf Stork. Strange--almost miraculous--as it must have seemed at first, the fact remained that Stork and every one of his companions had vanished as completely as if they had been spirited away.

A surprise has this effect upon us all: we lose, for the moment, our natural powers of reasoning; we cannot, as it were, put two and two together. They could not explain this seeming miracle, until, as in a flash, they remembered the U93. There could be no question that Stork and those who were with him had been taken on board the German submarine.

Thus, as at a stroke, were all Captain Crouch's hopes dashed to the ground: his well-laid plans had gone astray. If Stork was already on board the submarine, he had accomplished the very task for which he had been sent out into the North Sea. The U93 had been warned of the coming raid.

There is an old proverb which reminds us that the worm will sometimes turn; and this is exactly what happened now. Crouch had set forth in the "Kitty McQuaire" with the idea of bringing a German spy to his account. At first Stork had been the fugitive; but before the full disc of the round morning sun was visible

above the skyline, the tables had been completely turned.

The U93 rose once again from out of the water like some weird, remorseless and formidable monster that lives and has its being in the unfathomable depths of the sea. Almost immediately, two men made their appearance in the conning-tower; and one of these was the commander, whilst the other was Rudolf Stork. By a strange coincidence, there was not another ship in sight, except a trawler, far away to the south.

The U93, in accordance with the design of the very latest submarines, was armed with two quick-firing guns. With both of these, without a moment's delay or hesitation, the Germans opened fire upon the "Mondavia," raking her with shrapnel from end to end.

There was no question now as to who commanded the ship; for the very first projectile burst immediately above the bridge, so that both Whisker and Cookson--who were standing side by side--were struck, the former falling heavily to the ground, whereas Captain Cookson, carrying a hand to his shoulder, cried out that his collar-bone was broken.

Crouch flew to the "telegraph" which communicated with the engine-room below, and shouted his orders for "full steam ahead." He then put the helm hard a-port, and did so only in the nick of time; for the white streak of a torpedo flashed through the water, missing the steamer's rudder by five yards at the most.

There was a kind of fog upon the sea, the surface of which--though by no means calm--was a great deal less troubled than it had been on the evening of the previous day. Captain Crouch recognized at once that their only chance of safety lay in flight. Moreover, two things were necessary: firstly, never to present a broadside to the submarine, which would thereby be offered a suitable target for a Krupp torpedo; secondly, to follow--as far as was possible--a zigzag course, so that a torpedo, if discharged, would probably miss its mark.

There followed, during the early hours of that bleak, sunless morning, a stern chase--a matter of life and death. The "Mondavia" soon proved herself capable of holding her own. Both wind and tide were against the submarine, which also--by reason of the fact that she carried the crew of the "Marigold" over and above her normal complement--was overloaded. The tramp, which was under full steam, had been dry-docked that very autumn; and on this occasion she excelled herself, surpassing all that her builders had ever dreamed of in the way of speed.

None the less, never for a single instant were those on board the steamer out of danger. The forward gun of the U93 spat fire like a cornered cat, raining in quick succession a perfect hurricane of shells upon the unprotected decks. Crouch behaved as he had done on board the "Harlech" when that ship had been under fire from the "Dresden's" guns. He stood steadfast at his post, with Jimmy Burke at his side, giving his orders to the engine-room and to the quartermaster at the

wheel, encouraging, both by his example and his words, those whose duty it was to remain upon the deck.

Once, when he looked back, he saw that the submarine had dropped far behind.

"We'll escape, my boy!" he cried. "We'll slip away by the very skin of our teeth."

"What's that?" cried Jimmy, whose eyes had been fixed ahead.

Captain Crouch at once brought his telescope to his only eye. And there, sure enough, immediately in front of them, standing out in a line like a great row of forts, right across the horizon, were the great battle-cruisers of the German Navy which had come from Kiel, that the white cliffs and green fields of England might echo with the thunder of their guns.

# CHAPTER XXV--Væ Victis

To anyone who has the slightest knowledge of the fighting ships of the world, the identification of the German Dreadnought cruisers is a comparatively easy matter. The ships which took part in the third German raid, which left Kiel on the night of January 23, have certain characteristics of their own which no one can mistake.

The latest of these, the "Derfflinger," was launched at Hamburg in 1914. On the outbreak of war, she was actually performing her trials, and was no doubt hurriedly completed and commissioned. She is distinguishable by the fact that all her turrets are in the centre line, an arrangement that enables the majority of her guns to fire a broadside to either flank. The main battery consists of eight 12-inch guns. The turbine engines are of the very latest pattern, and are designed for a speed of twenty-seven knots.

The "Seydlitz," a slightly larger edition of the "Moltke" and the "Goeben," is in a class by herself. She has about the same speed as the "Derfflinger," but is not so heavily armed, her largest guns not being greater than 11-inch weapons--a calibre that is unknown on board the ships of the British Navy. As far as can be ascertained, the "Seydlitz" cannot be regarded as a complete success. By reason of her great speed, her heavy batteries and thick armour belt, she consumes, when

travelling at her utmost speed, an amazing amount of fuel, which could not easily be replaced if the ship were operating in distant seas.

The "Moltke" is the sister-ship of the famous "Goeben," which succeeded in escaping from the Mediterranean squadron at the beginning of the war, seeking refuge in the Bosphorus, where she hoisted the Turkish ensign. The "Moltke" was launched at Hamburg in 1910, and is considerably faster than either the "Seydlitz" or the "Derfflinger"--which can be accounted for by the fact that she is not so heavily armoured.

The last ship of the squadron, the "Blücher," is, for more reasons than one, likely to be of the greatest interest to English readers; firstly, because of the fate with which she met, and secondly, because of her history.

In the year 1908, it was known in German Naval circles that the British Admiralty was building a new class of ship, which was to combine something of the heavy batteries and armour-plate protection of a battleship with the speed of a first-class cruiser. The designs of these ships--which are now known as the "Invincible" class--were kept wholly secret; and beyond the fact that they were likely to prove a kind of combination of the Dreadnought and the cruiser, nothing concerning the details of their construction was known either at Hamburg or at Kiel.

It was none the less necessary for the German naval authorities to design and construct some kind of ship capable of holding its own against the British "Invincibles"; and the "Blücher" was the result.

It must be confessed--even by the most patriotic Junkers that ever swaggered in Unter den Linden--that she was a failure. When launched, the ship was found to be very greatly inferior to its British rivals. The "Blücher" carried twelve 8.2-inch guns as against the eight 12-inch guns of the "Invincible." Her top speed was also a good knot an hour less than that which could be accomplished by the British ships, in spite of the fact that she was no better protected and was even more expensive in regard to fuel. It is, indeed, doubtful whether this ship can rightly be called a "battle cruiser," though--to her cost--she was included in the German battle-cruiser squadron that set forth from the Bight of Heligoland, on the morning of January 24, to raid the English coast.

All these ships have a most formidable appearance. Combining, as they do, great strength with maximum speed, they are enemies not to be despised. They appear even more powerful than they are, since all lie low in the water and have enormous, stumpy funnels from which the black smoke rolls in clouds.

Captain Crouch, who was well acquainted with the ships of the German Navy, recognized them the moment he brought his telescope to bear in their direction, and saw at once the extreme danger of the situation. The German cruisers, steering due north-west, were making straight for the "Mondavia," which was al-

ready within range of the great 11-inch guns. Flight would be altogether useless, since the men-of-war were travelling at, at least, twice the pace of the tramp. Moreover, to turn back would be doubly fatal, since this would bring the "Mondavia" within range of a torpedo discharged from the submarine.

Captain Crouch was not a man who took long to make up his mind. When it was necessary to act, to take the greatest risks, he never hesitated to do so. He may already have given himself up for lost, or else he may have thought that a small chance, one last hope, remained; in any case, he put the ship about, and steaming at full speed, made straight for the U93.

As he did so, the submarine re-opened fire; and once again the "Mondavia" was raked from forecastle to poop, so that the life of every man on board was in the utmost peril. Nor was this all, for a greater calamity was yet to come. It was as if a thunder-cloud had burst immediately above them, when the great guns of the "Blücher" opened fire.

A loud report smote the cold, grey waters of the Dogger Bank in such a manner as the hammer of Vulcan must have sounded and echoed in Olympus. Almost immediately, the great shell was heard shrieking and singing on its way. It fell some distance short, plunging into the sea at a point from which a huge column of water shot upward like a jet.

We have all seen raindrops splashing in a puddle, and this is precisely what happens, on a very much larger scale, when projectiles from modern guns strike the surface of the sea. Sometimes, owing to the extreme sensitiveness of many high explosives, shells will burst on impact with the water, which is churned white by the explosion, as under the triple screws of an Atlantic liner. The fire from the quick-firing guns on board the submarine was a menace to the individual lives of those on board the tramp; but one shell from the "Blücher," if it struck a vital part of the ship, would suffice to send her to the bottom.

It must be remembered that the range of the great guns of modern navies is so long that ships come into action the moment they are in sight. In this case, the German battle-cruisers were still so far distant that they could not have been recognized with the naked eye. No more was visible than the great funnels, from each of which was issuing a long trail of smoke; so that the gigantic ships appeared as four black smudges on the sky-line.

To them the "Mondavia" must have appeared as but a small speck upon the horizon; and, in face of this, it is somewhat remarkable that the "Blücher" should have opened fire with such little hesitation. At that distance she could not possibly have seen the submarine, which was more than a mile to the north of the steamer. Hence, since the "Mondavia" flew no flag, it was not at first apparent to Captain Crouch on what justification the German gunners had got to work.

There is, however, a factor in modern warfare, both on sea and land, which

must always be taken into account; and this is expressed in one word--"Wireless." The U93 was moving forward at her topmost surface speed. She was equipped with wireless apparatus, of which, of course, the "Mondavia" was deficient; and there could be little doubt that the U93 was already in direct communication with the "Blücher."

What her first message was may safely be left to the imagination. She must have signalled to the effect that the tramp was an enemy, flying for safety, with the German submarine in hot pursuit. The commander of the U93 had realized that his prey was fast slipping through his fingers, that the "Mondavia" was making good her escape by means of her superior speed and the ability of her commander.

Hence, the U93 needed assistance, and fortunately for her, powerful support was close at hand. She sent her wireless signal to the "Blücher," the nearest of the four German battle-cruisers; and presently, in quick succession, the great guns were thudding forth their messages of destruction.

Luckily for Captain Crouch and all those on board the tramp, the range was still too long for accurate shooting. The "Mondavia" had completed a semicircle, and was now steaming back upon her own track. For all that, if the chase was continued, the battle-cruisers must soon come within decisive range, when no power on earth could serve to save the ship.

Captain Whisker had been carried below unconscious. Cookson was in his own cabin, where, with the help of the ship's steward, he was endeavouring to bandage his hurt shoulder. As neither one nor the other had the slightest knowledge of first-aid dressing, the thing was clumsily done; and besides, the captain had lost so much blood already that he was very nearly in a fainting condition, and in no fit state to return to his post on the bridge.

Fortunately, in Captain Crouch, there was one on board capable of dealing with the situation, who saw at once that desperate measures were necessary, and was resolved to take them.

It was impossible to suppose that the "Mondavia" could live for long under fire from the guns of such monster ships as the German battle-cruisers. One well-placed shell--as we have said--would be sufficient to complete the business. Still, inasmuch as Captain Crouch was fleeing from the men-of-war with all the speed he could, the chances were that the fatal moment would be delayed. The German ships were steaming ahead at the rate of about twenty-five knots an hour, with the result that the "Mondavia" was being rapidly overhauled. Even now, the great shells were falling in dangerous proximity to the ship.

The commander of the U93 saw his danger in a trice. No doubt he had thought it quite improbable that the "Mondavia" would turn and make back upon her own wake. Had Crouch not been a man of iron, he would have endeavoured to escape towards the coast. As it was, he headed straight for the submarine with

all the engine power that the old tramp had at her disposal.

The "Blücher's" shells were falling thick and fast, when quite suddenly the battle-cruiser ceased firing, so that the silence that fell upon the sea seemed strange and deathlike after the colossal uproar of the guns. The truth was that the commander of the submarine and Rudolf Stork himself, both of whom were still together in the conning-tower, had been the first to recognize that the U93 was in danger of destruction from the "Blücher's" shells, since the submarine and the steamer were drawing closer and closer together. Accordingly, another wireless message was despatched, asking the "Blücher" to hold back her fire.

In warfare, it often happens that deeds are accomplished so daring that even those who witness them cannot believe them true. So was it now with the commander of the U93, who could not at first bring himself to believe that it was Crouch's deliberate intention to run him down.

A torpedo, fired from the submarine, passed through the water like a flash of light, and missed the "Mondavia's" bows by a matter of inches. Captain Crouch, upon the bridge, threw back his head and laughed; but it was the laugh of one who was quite beside himself with intense excitement and the savage exhilaration of the moment.

Jimmy Burke could not refrain from laughing, too. The moment was one of ecstasy. They were flying onward through the water straight for what looked like sudden death; the living shells no longer plunged into the sea on either side of the ship, but the small quick-firing guns of the submarine had re-opened with a deadly accuracy. Indeed, the range was so decisive that it was almost impossible to miss so large a target.

The canvas screens, which guarded the bridge upon which Crouch and Jimmy Burke were standing, were torn to rags and tatters. The funnel was so riddled with shot that it was like a sieve. The teak decks were splintered right and left, and in some places the taffrails were so twisted by the sheer force of exploding shells that they resembled corkscrews.

As they drew nearer to the submarine, the danger they were in became more imminent. The noise was deafening. The surface of the sea both to port and starboard was lashed by showers of shrapnel bullets, so that it was just as if hailstones were falling from the leaden skies.

At this supreme moment, Jimmy Burke could not take his eyes from Captain Crouch, who was like a man transfigured. In his very attitude there was something heroic. He now stood motionless, still and silent as a statue cut in stone. He no longer laughed. He looked neither to the right nor left, but straight ahead, his great, square chin protruding more than ever, his single eye fixed and yet ablaze.

He himself was at the helm. The quartermaster, whose place he had taken, lay face downward in the welter of his blood, struck stone dead in the fulfilment

of his duty.

Crouch gripped the handles of the wheel so tightly that the knuckles on his sunburnt hands showed white beneath the taut skin. The man was evidently wrought up to the very highest pitch, his iron nerves strained to the utmost. When the shells burst about his ears, he never flinched, nor moved the fraction of an inch. He kept his eyes glued to the German submarine ahead, and moved the wheel, first this way and then that, so that the bows of the "Mondavia" were ever directed straight for the U93.

The commander of the submarine saw his danger just too late. He put his helm hard a-starboard, hoping to escape across the steamer's bows, and get a broadside target for his last torpedo. The movement was fatal, for Crouch's eye was quick to see, as his hands were quick to act. The "Mondavia" swung in upon her victim, as a half-blind rhinoceros charges when brought to bay.

Jimmy Burke, forgetful of his own great danger and the extreme peril in which all on board lay, dashed down the bridge steps, crossed the forward well-deck, and raced to the forecastle-peak.

He reached this point of vantage in time to behold the consummation of this tragedy, or epic--or whatever it may be. He looked down upon the submarine, rocking on the swell, and saw a torpedo shoot into the sea and flash into nothing in the distance. He could see those of the crew who were on deck--the men who had worked the guns. They were so close he could even distinguish the whites of their staring eyes. And there, standing at the elbow of the round-faced, young commander, was Rudolf Stork--the paid servant of the Wilhelmstrasse, the man who had served the Fatherland for gold.

Rage seized him when Stork saw his danger and recognized the boy who had tracked him, half by pluck and half by chance, from the close-packed streets of New York City to the sombre desolation of the Dogger Bank. And then, fury gave place to terror--the last emotion that seizes all men who find themselves confronted by inevitable death.

There is nothing strange in that. Whatever faith we have in God, the only Over-Lord of Victory, death, standing on the threshold, must seem terrible by reason of the darkness and the mystery of the grave. All men have sinned, and this poor, desperate hireling more than most; and perhaps, at that grave, anxious moment, he saw the evil of his life take living shape and rise before him from the depths to taunt, threaten and condemn.

Be that as it may, he clasped his hands, and looked upward to the sky, as if seeking mercy there. And then, the iron bows of the steamer crashed into the U93. There was a loud bursting sound--a kind of wrench--and simultaneously a shout--human voices uplifted in anguish and dismay. And the U93 crumpled--just crumpled like a paper cap--and vanished in a thin, hissing cloud of steam, leaving

upon the surface a great, glassy pool of floating oil.

# CHAPTER XXVI--The Titans

The U93 went to the bottom like a stone. On the surface of the water a modern submarine is as vulnerable as she is deadly underneath it. These boats, when compared to ocean-going steamers, have but little stability and strength. They are the vipers of the sea--venomous snakes whose backs may be broken with the lash of a whip, whose heads can be crushed with a stone.

No sign of the submarine remained upon the surface, except the pool of oil and the struggling forms of three men, who had somehow escaped destruction at the moment of the collision. To save the lives of these was a duty that devolved upon Captain Crouch, by dint of the fact that, though he loathed the German nation from the Kaiser downward, he was still a British seaman who could not stand by in idleness and witness the needless death even of those who had betrayed him.

Lifebuoys were cast overboard, and with a promptness which says much for the discipline on board the "Mondavia," a boat was lowered, into which the three drenched, exhausted men were hauled neck and crop.

They were found to be three simple sailors; and though, because they were subordinates, they cannot be held entirely free from blame, it must be confessed that Captain Crouch was not filled with a great remorse that the irony of fate had not decreed that he should save the life of Rudolf Stork. In such a war as this personal animosity cannot be altogether absent. It was from the very beginning a war to the knife; and by methods of warfare hitherto undreamed of by the people of civilized nations, by abuse of the Red Cross and the enemy's uniform, and the introduction of poisonous gases and bullets reversed in their cartridge cases, Germany has decreed that it shall remain a war to the knife to the very end. Humanity, chivalry, even gallantry--these are the virtues that belonged to the heroes of the past: the paladins, the Crusaders, Wellington's soldiers, Nelson's sailors and the old Guard at Waterloo. Nor can the honest nations be held to blame to-day if the common enemy chooses to cast aside all that tends to make glorious and noble the terrors and the fearful sacrifices of war.

In sinking one of the most famous of the U-boats within range of the great

guns of four of the most powerful of the German battle-cruisers, Captain Crouch accomplished a feat which was as much to his own credit as it was of service to his country. Still, he could never have succeeded had he not been cast in a most heroic mould. Three separate times did the U93 attempt to torpedo the ship, and on each occasion the "Mondavia" escaped by a matter of a few feet, which is little enough when we come to consider the illimitable magnitude of the sea. Moreover, the merchant ship had been riddled fore, aft and amidships by the submarine's quick-firing guns, and it was sheer good luck that not one of these shells had struck a vital part of the ship. Two or three below the water-line would have been enough to cause the "Mondavia" to sink. Had the ship's steam steering-gear been damaged, or her engines rendered useless, Crouch could never have rammed the submarine and sent her to the bottom. On this occasion, as so often happens, fortune had favoured the brave. The boldest course had proved the safest after all.

However, the "Mondavia" was far from being out of danger, as those on board were soon to learn. The battle-cruisers had by now drawn so close to the British steamer that, in all probability, the loss of the submarine had been witnessed through the captain's telescope from the "Blücher's" bridge. At all events, five minutes had not elapsed after the three German seamen had been rescued from the water before once again the great guns of the "Blücher" opened fire.

This time, by reason of the fact that the range was more decisive, the "Mondavia" was in far more deadly peril. Every shell, as it came whistling and shrieking through the air, seemed to cry out aloud for vengeance for those who had perished on the U93.

To make matters worse, the "Moltke" took up the quarrel--if such it can be called, when on one side there is a giant and on the other a pigmy--and pounded the steamer till the sea on either side was white with beaten foam.

The battle-cruisers were still steaming due north-westward. For miles the horizon was streaked black with rolling smoke. Crouch could scarcely hope to make good his escape by heading straight for the coast. The "Mondavia" was far out to sea, and if she changed her course to the westward would be travelling in an oblique line across the front of the German cruisers, and of a certainty would be overhauled and sunk before she had gone a mile.

Crouch's only chance lay in holding to the same course as the enemy ships. Before long the "Mondavia" must be overtaken and destroyed. However, for the time being, Crouch could strive to delay the inevitable moment.

It was then a little after seven o'clock. The atmosphere was clear though the sky was cloudy. The sun, which had appeared for a few moments at daybreak, was now masked and invisible, except for a patch of brightness above the eastern sky-line. There were no ships in sight, save for a few trawlers veering towards the north. On that fateful morning the neighbourhood of the Dogger Bank--swarming

as a rule with fishing craft of every kind and description--was unusually deserted.

The German battle-cruisers were now close enough for their hulls to be distinguishable. The outline of each ship stood forth, clear-cut and black, against the sky-line. Each was rushing forward at its topmost speed, bearing down with inevitable precision upon the defenceless cargo ship, which, like an exhausted, hunted animal, strained every bolt, bar and rivet to save herself from unutterable disaster. Suddenly, it became apparent that, in addition to the Dreadnought cruisers, the sea was alive with a host of smaller craft--light cruisers and torpedo-boat-destroyers. There were in all--so far as they could see--six light cruisers and a number of destroyers, which were spread out on all sides like a ring of skirmishers or scouts.

In less than five minutes, the "Mondavia" was reduced to a floating wreck. She was so riddled with shell, so battered, torn and damaged, that she was no more than a sheer hulk, lying idle on the waves. Her funnel had been struck low down, and hurled piecemeal overboard, taking with it the greater part of the boat-deck and the upper davits. Both masts had been shot away, the main-mast falling forward, so that all the superstructure on the main-deck, from the companion-way to the chartroom, had been reduced to ruins. In the sides of the ship there were, at least, half-a-dozen gaping holes, each one large enough to admit the body of a man. One shell had burst in the engine-room, killing the chief engineer and wounding three of his assistants, and leaving the engines no more than a mass of scrap-iron.

How Crouch and Jimmy Burke lived in the midst of this, it is not possible to say. The dogs of war, ferocious though they be, are sometimes kind and sometimes pitifully cruel. One man will be killed by a spent bullet the very moment he comes within the sound of guns; whereas another, time and again, will live in the midst of mad, raging carnage, and come forth unscathed and still alive.

Crouch's clothes were in rags and tatters. He had been hurled to the forward well-deck when the bridge had given way, and had found himself buried beneath a heap of splintered wood and twisted brass and iron. He was bruised from head to foot, and had been, at first, a little stunned; for a moment he had not been able to remember where he was.

And Jimmy Burke was in no better plight. Indeed, he looked as if he had received a mortal wound, for he was all sprinkled with the blood of a man who had been killed quite near to him--a poor fellow who had been literally blown to pieces by an 11-inch shell that burst at his very feet.

Crouch, followed by Jimmy, dragged himself to the forecastle, which was the only point of vantage left on the demolished, shattered ship. Save these two, no one was to be seen upon the deck, in which great holes yawned like chasms. Here and there, in horrid attitudes, lay those who had given up their lives, who

had been murdered--for it was nothing else but murder--under the Naval Ensign of the German Empire, for the vile cause of the Fatherland and Kultur.

The great shells still rained in fierce and venomous profusion. Sooner or later, the unhappy ship must be struck below the water-line, when nothing could save the lives of those on board; for, not one of the ship's boats remained, and they could hope for little mercy from German seamen.

Captain Crouch looked about him like a man who finds himself, upon a sudden, on the horns of a dilemma. In spite of his dishevelled and tattered garments, he appeared quite unconcerned. He took not the least notice of either the great shells or the deafening explosions which every few seconds rent the air. He stood with his legs wide parted, and both hands thrust into his trousers pockets.

"I don't know how it is we're still alive," said he; "or how the old ship isn't lying on her beam ends, at the bottom of the sea. It's a mystery that no one will ever solve. It would stump Solomon himself, or my name was never Crouch."

"It can't last," said Jimmy, with his eyes fixed upon the gigantic shadow of the "Blücher."

"You're right, my boy," said Crouch; "it can't last; that's sure. We've run our course; we've hove in sight of the harbour lights where all men some day come to port. There's no need to signal for a pilot."

Even as he spoke, a shell came rushing past their ears, so close that the hot air in their faces was like the blast from an oven. It plunged into the sea, not twenty yards from the "Mondavia's" bows; and both Crouch and his young companion were wetted from head to foot with spray.

"Another one like that," said Crouch, "and there's an end to you and me, and the poor old ship as well."

For the next five minutes, these two stood side by side, waiting in heroic patience for the end, which seemed so long in coming. And then, on a sudden, like the sharp bark of an angry dog, a gun spoke--from the north.

Crouch had lost his telescope; but, bringing the open palm of a hand to his brow, he strained his eye ahead.

"Look there!" he cried. "Look there!"

"What is it?" asked Jimmy, breathless with instant hope and the terror of the moment. "What is it?"

"I may be wrong," said Crouch; "but, unless I'm much mistaken, that's one of the British light cruisers of the 'Arethusa' class, in all probability the 'Arethusa' herself, or else the 'Aurora.'"

A few minutes sufficed to prove Captain Crouch in the right. The "Aurora"--for it was she--had opened fire upon the leading enemy light cruiser, which lay some distance to the east. And presently, two other British ships appeared, which Crouch identified as the "Southampton" and the "Arethusa."

The appearance of the British men-of-war meant the saving of the "Mondavia"; since, the very moment the light-cruiser squadron hove in sight, the German Dreadnoughts left the merchant vessel to her fate, and directed their fire upon an enemy who was capable of answering back.

For all that, it was still a rank unequal fight; and Captain Crouch was even more perturbed as to what would be the fate of the light cruisers under the heavy gun-fire of the "Moltke," the "Derfflinger," the "Blücher" and the "Seydlitz," than he had been anxious about himself and the ship that he commanded.

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "They're as game as bantams. I never saw the like of it! They've speed enough, it's true; but if it comes to a square fight, they won't be able to keep above water for half-an-hour at the most."

It seemed, indeed, that the light-cruiser squadron was purposely courting death. Seven ships were now in sight: the "Southampton," "Nottingham," "Birmingham," "Lowestoft," "Arethusa," "Aurora" and "Undaunted," besides Commodore Tyrwhitt's destroyer flotillas. These ships would have proved far more than a match for the lighter German men-of-war, but the presence of the four "Dreadnoughts" put a very different aspect on the situation. And yet, the "Arethusa" and her sisters tore onward, at full steam ahead, making straight into the very jaws of a formidable and powerful foe

"I'm thinking," said Captain Crouch to Jimmy, "I'm thinking the 'Arethusa' must have something up her sleeve."

She had. She knew that she was backed up by some of the finest ships that were ever launched, the monarchs of the sea. And presently, from the north, the sudden report of a great gun smote the desolation of the Dogger Bank with a mighty thunder-clap which was like the bursting of the skies. And a little after, there hove into sight upon the northern sky-line, the "Tiger" and the "Lion," and, in their wake, the "Princess Royal," the "Indomitable" and the "New Zealand." The Titans were come to pick up the gauntlet thrown by the Giants.

# CHAPTER XXVII--The Battle of the Dogger Bank

The German Emperor had styled himself "The Admiral of the Atlantic"--a title that rested largely upon the power and seeming invincibility of such battle-cruisers as the "Seydlitz," and the "Goeben."

For all that, the dominion of the Western Ocean--as, indeed, of all the High Seas from the Gulf of Mexico to the Sea of Japan--had been settled generations ago, before ever the first ship of the Prussian Navy was launched, when Sir Francis Drake sailed to the Spanish Main and the guns of Nelson's wooden, three-decked ships thundered in the Bay of Aboukir.

The German press and people may have claimed at the outset of the war that the steel ships of modern navies had never been put to the test, and Britain had once again to prove that she was Mistress of the Seas. In this sweeping announcement an important fact was forgotten: namely, that it was Britain herself who had invented, designed and launched the very first ironclad that ever put to sea. And what England had invented, England, in all probability, knew how to use.

There was no reason to suppose that Great Britain had fallen in any way behind the other nations in the art of naval construction. So much skill, science and money had been expended in the naval dockyards of the country that Englishmen had every reason to believe that, when the tragedy of a universal war fell like a thunderbolt upon the whole civilized world, the British Navy would not be found wholly unprepared.

If the "Derfflinger" and her companions were the giants of the ocean, the British battle-cruisers were the Titans. They represented the triumph of modern naval construction. They were the very finest ships afloat.

The "Lion," which led the line, steaming at the rate of twenty-eight knots an hour, carried a main armament of ten 13.5-inch guns, and flew the flag of the Vice-Admiral, Sir David Beatty. She and her sister-ship, the "Princess Royal," are ships

that cannot easily be mistaken. They have three funnels; one almost amidships, another aft; whereas the third, which is considerably more slender than the others, is situated abaft the mainmast, immediately in rear of the bridge.

The "Invincible" has already been mentioned as the first type of battle-cruiser ever built; and the "Indomitable," the ship that accompanied Sir David Beatty on that eventful morning, was a slightly smaller member of the same class. The "New Zealand" was an improved type, slightly larger, but capable of no greater speed. The normal speed of both these last-named ships was inferior to that of the "Tiger" and the "Lion" by at least three knots an hour.

Of the whole squadron, the "Tiger" was perhaps the masterpiece. This ship is the largest battle-cruiser afloat. She was laid down at Clydebank, and launched in 1914. Her total cost has been estimated at two million, two hundred thousand pounds--a sum considerably in excess of the cost of the very latest Dreadnought battleship, such as the "Iron Duke" or the "Maryborough." She is armed, like the "Lion," with 13.5-inch guns. In appearance, having three funnels of the same size and only one mast, she resembles no other ship afloat. In her, and in the "Lion" and her sisters, the most wonderful results have been obtained. These ships have a normal speed of twenty-eight knots an hour, which can no doubt be exceeded under stress; that is to say, they are capable of travelling at half the rate of an express train, in spite of the fact that they are heavily armoured, and carry colossal guns, which have an effective range at seven miles.

The turbine engines of the "Tiger" are something to marvel at. They have a horse-power of a hundred thousand; whereas the turbines of a great battleship, such as the "Iron Duke," are designed for twenty-nine thousand horse-power.

The fight that took place that bleak, wintry morning, in the neighbourhood of the Dogger Bank, was the first occasion upon which ships of the "Dreadnought" period were matched against each other. It was therefore something in the nature of an experiment. Both the English and the German navies had a certain amount of curiosity in regard to the fighting capacities of their opponents, which neither the Battle in the Bight of Heligoland, nor even the engagement off the Falkland Islands, had served to satisfy. For instance, British seamen, believing half the tales they had heard, had come to believe that German naval gunnery was something almost superhuman. Also, the comparative value had yet to be proved of the British heavy 13.5-inch gun as opposed to the lighter, but quicker firing, 11-inch weapon with which the German cruisers were armed.

The combat that ensued was greatly to the credit of the British Navy. It proved, in the first place, that our naval constructors had not been at fault, that our Intelligence Department was efficient and alert, and that British gunnery was by no means inferior to the German, and last, but not least, that the spirit that animated British seamen was the same that had existed in bygone days, when

Drake, Blake, Hawke, Nelson and St. Vincent swept the enemies of Britain from the seas.

The first part of the action was witnessed by both Crouch and Jimmy Burke from the shattered, broken deck of the "Mondavia." Of the concluding phase they heard afterwards, when they were picked up, like men who had been marooned, by H.M.S. "Cockroach," which--it will be remembered--was the self-same torpedo-boat-destroyer which had come to the assistance of the "Harlech" off the Scilly Isles.

The "Lion" and the "Tiger" tore into action with something of the ferocity of the noble, savage beasts from whom they had taken their names. The "Lion" was in the van, with the pennant of Sir David Beatty flying in the wind. A long trail of black smoke came from her triple funnels, as shot after shot rang out in slow precision, like the sullen tolling of a bell.

At first she did no more than endeavour to pick up the range. A distance of about eleven miles still separated the rival ships. The "Mondavia" lay mid-way between the two squadrons, so that the hulls of both the German and the British ships stood forth upon either horizon with alarming clearness.

It was precisely nine minutes past nine when the "Lion" hit the "Blücher." Shortly afterwards, the "Tiger" drew up to within range, and the "Lion" fired salvo after salvo at the "Seydlitz," which stood third in the German line.

Presently, the "Princess Royal" joined in the battle, and fired with such deadly accuracy that almost at once the Blücher was observed to be rapidly falling astern.

It was a running fight across the open reaches of the North Sea. The Germans were heading straight for safety, for Heligoland and the mine-field in the Bight; and it was now that it was proved that as good work can be done on board a ship in action in the stokeholds as in the turrets.

As has been explained, the "Indomitable" and the "New Zealand" were not such fast ships as the three larger cruisers. The stokers were called upon to make stupendous efforts, and as one man they answered to the call. Every available hand was turned down to the stokeholds, and there they worked like Trojans, stripped to the waist as seamen fought in the days of old, until they were black as negroes from the coal dust, and the perspiration poured from off their moist and glistening backs.

The noise of the firing was now like a tremendous thunderstorm. On both sides the battle-cruisers were engaged, whereas the lighter craft and torpedo-boat-destroyers flew here and there like swarms of gnats, their quick-firing guns spluttering right and left.

When it became apparent that the "Blücher" was seriously damaged, the "Princess Royal" shifted her fire to the "Seydlitz," leaving the "Blücher" to the by-

no-means tender mercy of the "New Zealand" and "Indomitable."

Both the "Seydlitz" and "Derfflinger" were in a bad way: the former was seen to be on fire. The Vice-Admiral ordered the flotilla cruisers and destroyers to drop back, as their smoke was fouling the range, and the German ships were completely screened from view by the black clouds that rolled upon the surface of the sea.

It was this that at once saved the "Seydlitz" and sealed the fate of the "Blücher." The "Tiger," as soon as the third ship in the German line became invisible, turned her attention to the "Blücher," which was already being pounded to death by the 12-inch guns of the "New Zealand."

As a last hope, the German admiral ordered his destroyers to drop back, to threaten the British ships with their torpedoes, and to foul with their black smoke the line of fire. For a moment, this new danger was so imminent that both the "Lion" and the "Tiger" were obliged to shift their fire from the battle-cruisers to the destroyers, which soon afterwards were compelled to beat a hasty retreat.

The "Blücher"--which a few minutes before had seemed so formidable and had presented so bold a front--was now in the last throes of her death. It is not possible for anyone to describe, it would be sheer presumption for anyone even to attempt to describe, the scenes of horror and carnage that were taking place between the "Blücher's" decks.

She was riddled like a sieve. Her seven-inch plates amidships had been hammered into pig-iron; her four-inch plates, forward and aft, had been shattered into fragments. One of her great guns had suffered a direct hit; and a weapon, weighing thirty-six tons, and capable of firing a projectile of six hundred and sixty-one pounds, was cast bodily into the sea like a broken toy. Both her masts were shot away. Her forward funnel was uprooted like a rotten tree in a gale. Her battery decks were strewn with the mangled remains of the men who--it must be confessed--stuck to their guns until there were no guns left to serve, who fought with extreme gallantry to the very end.

If naval warfare is more romantic, less monotonous and weary than the trench-fighting to which the armies in Flanders have been reduced, it is, at least, in such cases as the fate of the "Blücher," even more ghastly and more tragic.

The great ship had taken on a heavy list to port. Her speed had died down gradually to not much more than fifteen knots an hour, when suddenly she hauled out and steered straight for the north.

Upon the instant the "Indomitable," like a great savage, stealthy animal, broke from the British line and bore down upon her prey. There was something in her aspect, in her dull, slate-grey outline, that reminded one of an enormous cat that creeps upon a bird lying helpless with a broken wing.

One after the other in quick succession her guns roared upon the beaten

ship, which suddenly heeled right over so that the light colour below her waterline glittered in the daylight, and only the tops of her remaining funnels were visible from the starboard side. And then, she dived. With a roar, and in the midst of a great cloud of steam, she, with six hundred souls on board, slid into the depths.

In the meantime, the battle continued as the great ships raced towards the south. Both the "Seydlitz" and the "Derfflinger" had been severely punished; and there is little doubt that the victory would have been made far more complete than it was, had not a mishap befallen the "Lion." A shell from the "Derfflinger" struck her in a vital part, so that she dipped peak-foremost in the sea. Moreover, her engines had been damaged; and it was this that had the immediate effect of putting her out of the action, since she could no longer hope to keep pace with either the "Tiger" or the "Princess Royal."

Admiral Beatty, boarding the destroyer "Attack," shifted his flag to the "Princess Royal," and did not rejoin his squadron until half-past eleven, when he met them retiring towards the north. He then learnt what had happened from Rear-Admiral Brock. The German ships had been pursued to the very mouth of the mine-field, where the British squadron was threatened by submarines and seaplanes, besides a gigantic Zeppelin which had put out from Heligoland. It is fully in accordance with German views upon the conduct of modern naval warfare, that this Zeppelin should have dropped bombs among the British boats that were endeavouring to save the lives of the survivors of the "Blücher," who were swimming here and there at random. Had it not been for this dastardly incident, the Germans might have had some good reason to be proud of the Battle of the Dogger Bank. Their ships were outmatched and overpowered, and yet they fought gallantly in face of heavy odds. As the matter stands, not only did they tarnish the honour of their country once again, by scorning the noblest traditions of the sea, but they had the audacity to claim the whole affair as a glorious German victory.

They did this in the belief that they had sunk the "Tiger" or the "Lion," or both. As a matter of fact, the total British casualties, including killed and wounded, were four officers and thirty petty officers and men; and the material injury done to the "Tiger" and the "Lion" was only such as would take a few weeks to repair, though it was certainly necessary to tow the last-named ship to port.

On the German side the losses were considerable. The "Blücher," which was certainly a notable asset to the German navy, was sunk; whereas the "Derfflinger" and "Seydlitz" were damaged much more seriously than any British ship. As far as personnel was concerned, the total German casualties certainly exceeded a thousand--killed, wounded and prisoners.

But the Battle of the Dogger Bank cannot be regarded solely in respect of the relative loss of ships and men on either side. It was much more. Its moral effect was universal. It re-established the old order of things that had existed at the

outbreak of war. It decided, once and--we must hope--for all, British supremacy upon the seas. Though a small action--as things go nowadays--it was decisive, in the same sense as the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the battles of the First of June, Trafalgar and the Nile.

The flag of Germany had already been swept from the seas. The lesson of the Dogger Bank to Grand Admiral von Tirpitz and his colleagues amounted to this: that it was not only a risky, but was likely to prove an exceedingly unprofitable undertaking, to operate with sea-going ships--whether battleships, cruisers or destroyers--far from the security of the Kiel Canal.

# CHAPTER XXVIII--The Wounded "Lion"

As the battle rolled away in the distance, and the smoke of the great fighting ships grew faint beyond the southern skyline, Captain Crouch and Jimmy Burke remained standing together on the forecastle peak of the half-wrecked cargo ship. Not a word had been spoken for some time. It was Crouch who was the first to find his voice.

"All my life I've been proud of one thing," said he: "that I was born a Britisher. I was always sort of sorry for a dago of any kind. But, half-an-hour ago, when I saw the 'Lion' and the 'Tiger' come charging into action, I felt something in my throat, my lad, that I never felt before. It was just wonderful and splendid. War, nowadays, isn't so much a matter of physical strength and courage as a question of national wealth, industry and invention; we live in a scientific age. And, take it from me, a ship like the 'Tiger' is a kind of eighth wonder of the modern world."

"I suppose," said Jimmy, "that what you say is true; things have changed since men fought with cutlasses and boarded enemy ships. It's more terrible to-day--and marvellous."

"So it seems to me, too," said Captain Crouch. "And now, this is no time to stand idle; there's much for both of us to do. Firstly, we must look to the wounded--and I'm afraid there are more than enough on board. Secondly, we must see if anything can be done to get the engines under way."

Accordingly, then and there, they went down into the engine-room, which they found in a state of chaos. As we know, the chief engineer had been killed; but, in the alley-way on the starboard side they encountered the second engineer, whose head was done up in a bandage. He had been knocked down by the force of an exploding shell, and his head cut open against an iron stanchion.

It was he, with Crouch and Jimmy Burke, who gathered together as many of the ship's hands as they could find in a fit state to do an hour's honest work. They removed such of the smaller parts of the machinery as had been thrown out of gear, when the total amount of damage done could be estimated. It was at once evident that there was no possibility whatsoever of the engines being repaired. Moreover, how the old ship remained afloat was little short of a miracle. They could hope for nothing but to be found either by the British squadron returning to home waters or some ship bound for Newcastle, Leith or Hull.

As far as the wounded were concerned, they were able to do much. Crouch took possession of the ship's medicine chest, and soon proved that he had a passable knowledge of both surgery and medicine. A man who has spent a great part of his life in the wilderness of Central Africa is not likely to be wholly ignorant as far as drugs are concerned.

More than a fifth of the crew had been killed; and many of the wounded had received the most ghastly injuries. The modern rifle bullet is a humane means of waging war. Being nickel-plated it gives a clean wound, which under ordinary conditions will heal rapidly. If it kills, it kills instantly, and as often as not without pain. Shell fire, however, is very different. Leaden shrapnel bullets are both large, rough-edged, and liable to cause gangrene in those who are not in the best of health. Common shell, charged with high explosives, causes infinite damage; and on board steel-plated ships, or in the vicinity of houses, men are horribly maimed and wounded by fragments of masonry and iron, by flying stones and splintered woodwork.

Captain Whisker was in a bad way. Though a man of considerable physical strength, he was in no fit condition to suffer continual loss of blood. His temperature had already risen to extreme fever heat; and there is little doubt that, had Crouch not administered suitable drugs in the right proportion, his old shipmate would have lost his life. As for Captain Cookson, sitting in a comfortable chair in the midst of the wreckage of what had once been his cabin, he gave vent to his feelings and opinions in regard to the German Empire.

Like all sailors he loved his ship. A true seaman will be a special pleader on behalf of his ship in much the same manner as an adoring mother will speak of a backward son. If a ship lies so heavy in the water that, when a squall is blowing, the waves sweep over her decks like water from a floodgate, she will be described as "steady as a rock." And if, on the other hand, she rolls at every

billow, and pitches into every minor trough, she is--in the unanimous opinion of her master and her crew--"seaworthy" in the higher sense of the word, whatever it may mean.

Captain Cookson loved the "Mondavia"; and when he looked about him and witnessed the destruction and havoc that had been wrought by the guns of the German ships, he railed at the whole Teutonic brotherhood, from the Kaiser to the last interned German waiter in a detention camp in England.

For all that, by wholesale round abuse, he was likely to do no more good to himself than harm to the German Empire. The fact was, all on board were in much greater danger than they knew of. For, during the last half-hour, the wind had got up, shifting to the south-west, so that once again they were able to hear the distant booming sound of the great guns of the rival battle-cruisers.

The ship lay in one of the innumerable channels that divide the shoals of the Dogger Bank. When any wind is blowing, it stands to reason that the current in these channels is exceedingly strong, since the sandbanks act in much the same way as breakwaters, holding back the tide, whilst the water becomes congested elsewhere.

Now, under the influence of the freshening wind, the "Mondavia" began to roll heavily upon the swell, and seeing that the upper part of the ship had been destroyed piecemeal by a hurricane of shells, she was in no fit condition to weather even the suspicion of a squall.

She began to ship water from the very first; and soon afterwards, Crouch, who was scanning the horizon with great anxiety, watching every shift of the wind, came to the conclusion that, unless the wind dropped as abruptly as it had risen, the "Mondavia" would go down.

The afternoon was now well advanced. The surface of the sea was broken in all directions by a great number of white waves running strongly northward. It was low tide, and on some of the shallows the foam showed white as snow in the sunlight that was now, for the first time that day, breaking from behind the clouds.

The "Mondavia" rolled as a ship rides at anchor. Her engines had been rendered useless; she was not capable of steaming a hundred yards. In addition to this her steering-gear was so seriously damaged, and the rudder itself so out of order, that she could do nothing else but drift, like a derelict, upon the tide.

To all intents and purposes, the ship was already a wreck; and every time she rolled to starboard, she shipped water in her holds; so that in less than an hour she was so low down that both well-decks were flooded, and those who passed along the alleyways were obliged to wade knee-deep in water. It must also be remembered that all her boats had been destroyed. Though the great guns were now silent towards the south, and there could be little question that the British

squadron was returning, there was neither a sail nor a smoke-stack in sight, as far as the eye could reach.

And even had there not been a dozen wounded men on board--many of whom were in a critical condition--the situation had been none of the pleasantest. Once again, it looked as if all on board were doomed.

Crouch, seeing that there was no time to waste, gathered together all the men he could find, and set about the construction of a raft. In this task he was aided by the dilapidated condition in which the German battle-cruisers had left the ship. In the ordinary course of events, on such occasions, it is necessary to break up the deck with axes; but here, this work had already been done by the shellfire of the "Blücher." The demolished chart-room and the shattered bridge afforded an abundance of material. There was no lack of rope on board, and the buoyancy of the raft was considerably increased by a number of life-buoys and belts.

The raft was constructed on the forward well-deck, where the men, often standing up to their waists in water, worked in feverish haste; and it is astonishing what prodigies of labour can be accomplished in so terrible a situation. Indeed, they worked not only to save, their own lives, but also the lives of those of their comrades who were unable to assist themselves.

One after the other, the wounded were brought down from the main-deck, and laid upon mattresses, spread side by side upon the raft. There was something extraordinarily precarious in the state of these unhappy men, since they had no means of knowing whether the buoyancy of the raft would maintain the weight of them all, when the ship, at last, went down. Crouch had taken every precaution that was possible; practically without exception the lifebuoys and cork lifebelts had been lashed underneath the raft, the better to serve their purpose.

When it became clear that the ship was sinking rapidly, Crouch ordered all hands to the forward well-deck, to be ready for the crisis. Fortunately, the ship was going down on an even keel. It was probable, however, that at the last moment she would dive. If she did so stern foremost, all would be well; but if she shot down into deep water bows first, then the chances were that the foremast would foul the raft, which would either be destroyed piecemeal, dragged under water, or so tilted up that those who had sought safety there would be cast headlong into the sea.

The disaster came about quite gradually, and in the very way that suited them best. They had plenty of warning that the ship was about to go. The raft had been manned by all--except a few who were prepared to swim--when the water rose like ether in a tube from the after well-deck to the poop. And then--of all strange things--the whole ship bobbed forward, like a playful duck in a pond, whilst the sea spread in a long, single wave from the poop to the forecastle-peak, above which the raft shot clear like a ship launched from the slips.

When they found themselves free and floating upon the surface of the water, they marvelled that the whole thing had been so inconceivably simple. They were huddled together like a flock of sheep, and in three minutes they were wet from head to foot in spray and from the water that splashed upward through the gaping holes in the structure of the raft. The last they saw of the "Mondavia" was the top of her shattered funnel, gliding on the surface for the fraction of a second, like the dorsal fin of a shark. Then, even this small black object vanished, and there was nothing to be seen but an infinity of bubbles and hundreds of broken pieces of spar and splintered, painted wood. The "Mondavia" was gone.

Those who, as a wise precaution, had taken to the water, now that it was seen that the raft was safe, scrambled one after the other, drenched and dripping, to this frail, uncertain place of safety. There, crowded together, shivering from the wet and from the cold, they awaited whatsoever fate might be held in store for them, in the midst of the desolation of the sea.

They could not have been more than fifteen miles from the coast, but that, to them, was an infinite distance; they could never hope to gain the security of land. They had neither sail nor mast; there had been no time to make one or the other. Neither had they any means of propelling the raft. They could but drift whither tide and wind and current took them, and this was out to sea.

Moreover, it was now rapidly growing dark. The sun, which had remained hidden throughout the greater part of that memorable day, showed for a few minutes upon the north-western horizon, in a great flood of red and gold, and then dropped down into the sea. At the same time, the squall freshened once again; the wind showed signs of blowing up to a gale; and to make matters worse, a kind of sea fog--dripping wet and cold--drove up from the south, like a great cloud of smoke.

Crouch was a man who had a will of iron and a great heart of gold. He knew that his own life, and the lives of all those who were with him, was in the hands of an Almighty Power. Those poor, lonely castaways were in the care of Providence.

At such an hour, they were not likely to forget the God Who had given them birth, Who had first opened their eyes to all the beauties of the earth, and held them wonderstruck, time and time again, at the immensity of the eternal sea. As one man, they offered up silent, breathless prayers. Nor were these prayers that they might live, such as might issue from a coward's lips, but prayers for ever-lasting grace, for forgiveness and courage to the last.

Crouch drew near to Jimmy. The raft was now so strained and lifted by the broken surface of the water that she groaned and fretted as in pain.

"I fear one thing," said he, "and one thing only; if the wind holds she'll break. She can't bear the strain much longer. She was knocked together like a Canton

flower-boat, or an Irish fence."

"There's still hope," said Jimmy Burke.

He spoke in a monotone, in a voice without expression, as if his words meant nothing. Indeed, he himself hardly understood them. In his heart he saw no cause to hope; there was no reason why they should be saved. He was wet to the skin and well-nigh frozen, so numbed in all his limbs that he could scarcely move. And it is only natural, when the body is reduced to this condition, that the mind should cease to work; it becomes a mere machine; and words are spoken in much the same way as a monkey jabbers or a parrot talks, without regard to their meaning.

They waited in patience, in silence and a fortitude that was something more than heroic. They waited for nearly another hour. By then, it was almost dark. The raft still held together, though those on board of her were almost perished. The sea fog had evidently driven past, for a few stars were visible above them.

And then it was that H.M.S. "Cockroach" hove in sight, steaming due north-westward at the rate of thirty knots an hour.

As one man, they lifted their voices in a great shout that went out upon the loneliness of the black, rolling waters, to reach the ears of men in comparative security, who stood bewildered and amazed in the very hour of their triumph and elation.

His Majesty's ship "Cockroach," but newly come from the thunder of the Dogger Bank, changed her course on the instant, and veered round to the south. And a little after, those castaways were saved.

They were well cared for by the seamen on board the torpedo-boat-destroyer, who could talk of nothing but victory and the sinking of the "Blücher." The survivors of the tramp steamer were given food and warm drinks; and the lights of Tynemouth were in sight when Jimmy Burke went on deck with Crouch and the Lieutenant-commander. The night had cleared. Above them was a whole canopy of stars. A new moon, too, had risen--a moon that heralded another month of the World War, of carnage, victory and repulse. And this moon had traced upon the surface of the sea a narrow, glittering silver pathway, which was like a road that led from out of all these scenes of horror and destruction to a far-off land of happy dreams. And on a sudden, into this silver pathway, there hove the shadows of two mighty giants. They heard the engines of a great ship groaning, as the strong screws churned the water; and then they saw the dark, colossal outline of one of the monarchs of the sea, with an even greater ship in tow.

Both were men-of-war that moved forward slowly, cumbrously, as if in pain. It was the wounded "Lion," crawling back to port--broken, bleeding, but invincible to the very end. On that calm, moonlit night, the "Lion" stood forth as a symbol of all England: hard hit and heavy of heart, but resolute, defiant and unconquerable.

# CHAPTER XXIX--Conclusion

There is romance in all things. No one will dispute, for instance, there is romance in war; but, it is not everyone that realizes that there is just as much that is romantic in a coalfield, a factory or a dockyard.

The traveller who journeys by night through one of the great industrial centres of England cannot fail to be impressed by the enormous strides that civilization has made during the last century, at the vast wealth of modern nations and the organization of industry. In a night scene, where great chimneys and the head-gears of coal-pits tower against the starlight, and the sky is red with the reflection of thousands of flaming furnaces and ovens, and white-hot rubbish is tossed here and there like hay in a new-mown field, there is much to marvel at, and not a little of romance.

Modern industry has grown like a mushroom. The invention of the steam-engine was the first step in the great march of science that led to the conquest of nature, and placed into the hands of man the illimitable resources of the earth. Mineral wealth is the capital of a country, a source of income that is almost inexhaustible.

In all busy England, there is no greater centre of activity than the mouth of the river Tyne. Here we have, clustered together within a comparatively small area, a score of flourishing towns--Shields, Tynemouth, Jarrow, Wallsend and Newcastle. Each of these is another Sheffield in itself, where working men labour for long hours, live well, grumble much, and find little time to wash. The men of Tyneside are the toughest breed in England--the toughest and, perhaps, the roughest, too.

It was to the Tyneside that the wounded "Lion" crawled home. It was to the mouth of this turbid, close-packed river, to the smoke-stained atmosphere of thousands of factories and workshops, that H.M.S. "Cockroach" brought the crew of the "Mondavia."

Many were wounded; some were even at the door of death; and all had looked Eternity in the face. They had come through unheard-of dangers; they

had waited for destruction, counting the seconds to the end; and they had been saved, as by a miracle, from out of the midst of the sea.

Perhaps one of the most singular and amazing contrasts in the universe lies in the transformation of a battlefield into a hospital ward. In one, we find such uproar and confusion, such thunder, fire, imprecations and groans of agony, as can only be compared to the nether regions. In the other, all is stillness, cleanliness, solicitude and care. It is a strange thing for a man who is but newly come from a scene of noisy and indescribable carnage, to look into the smiling eyes and red-cheeked, morning face of an English girl. It is not easy for him to comprehend that the same world can contain such vastly different aspects.

Upon a certain jetty above the mud-dyed water of the Tyne, a dozen of such women were waiting for the torpedo-boat-destroyer as she neared the shore. They were members of the Women's Emergency Corps, dressed as hospital nurses, who had come prepared for anything, but most of all to welcome back to Tyneside those who had helped to keep the flag of England flying on the seas.

Arrangements had been made for the casualties sustained by the Navy, but no one had reckoned upon the arrival of a score of seriously injured men of the crew of a small tramp steamer. However, there was one there--a lady in some position of authority--who took the matter into her own hands, with a degree of common-sense and promptitude that stands much to her honour.

"They must go to the American hospital," said she. "They have plenty of accommodation there, and are simply crying out for patients."

Accordingly, it was to this American hospital that the crew of the "Mondavia" were conducted, some on stretchers and some of the more seriously wounded--such as Captain Whisker--in motor ambulances which had been sent down to meet them.

It was a sad procession that passed through the streets that famous evening, when men could do nothing else but talk of the North Sea fight, and no one showed the smallest inclination to go to bed. When it became known what the fate of the well-known cargo ship had been, the eyes of these slow-thinking, stubborn people were opened at last to the full meaning of the war. That a powerful battle-cruiser like the "Blücher" should deign to direct her guns upon a defenceless merchant ship, proved only too clearly once again that the German Empire, thwarted in her senseless ambition, was prepared to stick at nothing.

It was conduct such as this that had turned the sympathies of the whole world towards the Allies; and it was by means of field hospitals and various Red Cross institutions that a large section of the American public had been able to give practical expression to their feelings.

Crouch, accompanied by the medical officer himself, who had come down to the jetty, was the first to reach the hospital. The little sea-captain was so accus-

tomed to hardships, and possessed of such great vitality, that the terrible ordeal through which he had passed did not seem to have had the slightest effect upon either his physical strength or his nerves. He walked briskly, though with his usual limp, carrying on an animated and somewhat one-sided conversation with the doctor.

It was hardly possible to mistake the American hospital--by reason of the enormous "Stars and Stripes," which, day and night, floated from above the portal. Within was everything that human ingenuity, modern science and the generosity of a great and charitable nation could devise. Captain Crouch was not the least surprised at that; but, what caused him to stop stone-dead, like a man struck, and stand gaping like a yokel at a fair, was the slim figure of a young girl, dressed in the white cap and apron of a trained nurse, who was the first person he set eyes upon the moment he entered the door.

Captain Crouch had a good memory. Besides, not so many weeks had elapsed since he had had his little confidential chat with Peggy Wade in the New York offices of Jason, Stileman and May. He remembered nearly everything Peggy had told him, even the story of the lucky sixpence that had once belonged to Admiral "Swiftsure Burke." He remembered, as well, the strange coincidence that had come to light in the "Goat and Compasses" hotel, on the night when he and Jimmy had deciphered the mysterious message.

"My lass," said he, holding out a hand, "my lass, we've met before."

Peggy must be excused if she could not at first recollect. Though Crouch's heart was the same as ever and his was the same indomitable will, he bore more than one mark of the recent conflict: his clothes were in rags, his face was cut and bruised, and he had been drenched to the skin in the salt water of the sea.

"Forgive me," said Peggy; "but, I can't remember."

And then, she saw Crouch's strange glass eye that always stared in front of him, and remembered on a sudden.

"Why, yes!" she cried, holding out both hands. "Of course, I remember now."

A few quick questions from either side were answered no less briefly. The waters of remembrance--even of quite little things--are very sweet indeed; and it was pure joy to them to speak of the Admiral's lucky sixpence.

It was that that brought back Crouch's mind to Jimmy, whom a strange fate was bringing to the very hospital where he would be cared for by the best friend and sole companion of other far-off days.

The ship's officers and crew of the "Mondavia" came to this quiet haven of rest like broken men--men who had been broken upon the relentless wheel of war. Jimmy Burke was well able to walk; for all that, he was so bruised and aching in his limbs that he did so like an old man, limping painfully and leaning heavily upon a stick.

His surprise and amazement can better be imagined than described when, arrived at the hospital, he found himself confronted by Peggy Wade. It was, indeed, a strange thing that, in so short a space of time, and after so many vicissitudes and dangers, these two should be brought together again. All the way across the Atlantic--more especially when they were off the coast of Ireland and pursued by a German submarine--the girl's thoughts had been of Jimmy, the friend and companion from whom she had parted in New York. Two days after the boy had gone, she had been offered a post with an American hospital which was about to be established in the north of England, prior to leaving for the scene of operations in France. And three days after her arrival in England, a strange "chance" brought him--hurt, broken and weary--to the very hospital where the girl herself was employed.

Jimmy's case was not very different from that of the majority of his companions. Though he had sustained no serious bodily injury, he had passed through an ordeal that had been enough to shatter the nerves of the strongest men. Long hours of peril, followed by sleepless nights, during which the greatest hardships have to be endured, will sap the strength and vital energy no less surely than the most dangerous wounds. It was necessary for all these men to rest, to be given nourishing food and to be allowed to sleep. As for those who were wounded--like the two merchant captains, Cookson and the burly Whisker--they received skilful treatment and the tenderest care; so that, though more than one was brought to the hospital more dead than alive, not one succumbed to his injuries.

In two days' time, when Jimmy Burke was quite restored to health, though still sore, a party of three people travelled to London by train. And these three were Captain Crouch, Peggy Wade (who had obtained a few days' leave) and Jimmy Burke himself.

Peggy and Jimmy had many things to speak of. The boy was delighted to hear that Aunt Marion was in England, too. As for Peggy, she listened in rapt attention to the whole story: of how Jimmy had discovered Stork on board the "Harlech," and how the villainous ship's carpenter had accused the boy of being a German spy. Crouch related his experiences at the top of his voice, working himself up into such a state of excitement that he waved his arms about him like a maniac, and from time to time laid hold of Jimmy by the shoulders and shook the boy violently, as if he desired to satisfy himself that the whole thing was not a dream.

He described the attack of the "Dresden," and the havoc that had been wrought by the guns of the German cruiser. He produced a note-book and pencil, and wrote out the mysterious message--the riddle that Jimmy had solved. And then, he told the girl how the ship had been sighted by the U93; and when he spoke of Jimmy's gallantry in saving the "Harlech" from destruction, Peggy felt a

thrill of pride that she counted as her best and truest friend one who had rendered such signal service to his country. Somehow or other, in the stuffy New York office, she had never looked upon Jimmy Burke in the light of a hero; he had been just a boy, with whom she had been wont to revel in the joys of forbidden office "picnics," making cocoa and cooking sausages upon the stove.

Hitherto, the girl's life had been somewhat circumscribed; and Crouch's story seemed to her too wonderful to be true. If the saving of the "Harlech" was an incident that caused her pulses to throb and the blood to fly to her face, all that had happened at the empty flat in the Edgware Road was fantastic and mysterious. It resembled an episode from the "New Arabian Nights."

She listened in breathless eagerness to the description of the "Marigold," and to how the "Kitty McQuaire" had sighted the enemy's battle-cruiser squadron, steaming north-westward for the Tyne. The sinking of the fishing-smack, the crew rescued by the "Mondavia" at the eleventh hour, the re-appearance of the dreaded U93, and the hurricane of shells hurled from the "Blücher's" guns--all this was the very essence of adventure. And then Crouch, with becoming modesty, told how he had rammed the submarine, and sent her to the bottom, speaking of the whole episode in much the same manner as he mentioned the loss of his favourite pipe.

When Peggy heard of the sufferings they had endured and the mental torture they had gone through when adrift upon the raft, she was filled with two emotions: a great wonder that human men could face such terrors and survive, a feeling of thankfulness to the great God Who watches over all, Who holds in wonderful subjection life and death, victory and defeat.

The story of the North Sea fight rang throughout the British Empire, from Melbourne to Vancouver, from the Orkneys to the Cape. It mattered little what the Germans had to say, whether or not they believed that the "Lion" and the "Tiger" had been sent beneath the waves; the fact remained that all Britons were assured that, should the German High Seas Fleet desire to put matters to the test, should the great battleships that were rusting in the Kiel Canal come forth upon the open sea, the Grand Fleet of Britain was prepared to meet them. Until that time, raids might take place, by aeroplanes and Zeppelins; but, as far as any grand invasion was concerned, the shores of England were--as they have been in the past--inviolable and secure.

A winter afternoon was far advanced, and the streets shrouded in gloomy darkness, when Crouch and his companions arrived in London. They went first to the head-offices of Jason, Stileman and May; then to Scotland Yard where they found Superintendent-detective Etheridge, who accompanied them to the Admiralty, where once again they were questioned and congratulated by Commander Fells.

All that happened in those few days in London can be told in a dozen lines.

Commander Fells had not spoken rashly when he promised that the Admiralty would not forget the services that Crouch and his young friend had rendered to the Allied cause. The firm of Jason, Stileman and May rewarded the boy handsomely for saving the "Harlech." Jimmy--who a few weeks ago had been a pauper in New York--found himself the possessor of a banking account such as he had never dreamed of. For days he carried his cheque-book about with him, as if it were a kind of passport--as, indeed, a cheque-book is.

The boy was given the choice of a commission in the Royal Naval Division or one of the Service battalions of the new army. He now wears a khaki uniform and a Sam Browne belt, and is burnt to the colour of tan by many months in the sun; and on each shoulder-strap and on the lapels of his jacket is the grenade crest and the title badges of the Royal Wessex Fusiliers.

As for the Baron von Essling--who was no less a person than "Mr. Valentine" of the "Hotel Magnificent"--he is to be found at a Prisoners-of-War camp at Wakefield, where he spends most of his time reading the works of Treitschke, who has much to say that is gratifying (to a German) on the subject of World Power and the downfall of the British Empire.

Unfortunately, Herr Rosencrantz still enjoys the privileges of his alleged neutrality; and it is quite unlikely--however long the war may last--that he will ever venture to risk his precious life. He still carries on his business as a money-lender, though nowadays his practices are said to have become so extremely dubious and shady that even Guildenstern has given up his share in the business.

Crouch is still Crouch, though he wears the uniform of a naval officer, with the twisted gold stripes upon his sleeve that denote the Royal Naval Reserve. The Admiralty--who were not disposed to waste the services of so valuable a man--saw to it that he received an appointment in which he was likely to have ample opportunity of displaying both his presence of mind and courage. He now holds a senior and responsible position on board one of the armed auxiliaries that are doing duty as light cruisers in the outer seas, though--in the public interest--what his work exactly is cannot be explained.

The World War has spread to the uttermost parts of the earth. It came, like a sudden and tremendous earthquake, to shake Civilization itself to its foundations. It has sent men, who in the long-off days of Peace thought little of wars and little dreamed of fighting, to all climes and countries. And so it was with Crouch and the two young friends that came with him to London. Peggy is working hard in a base hospital in France. Jimmy Burke is in Flanders. The exact whereabouts of Captain Crouch is quite unknown; he was last heard of in mid-Atlantic, where he is likely to be as much at home as anywhere else. One thing, however, is quite certain: in spite of his previous experience, in spite of the ill-fated U93, he cares no more for a German submarine than a porpoise or a black-fish.

The World War must continue to the end. Civilization can never again know the meaning of Peace until the German States themselves have endured the havoc and witnessed the desolation that follows in the path of War. To that end, Britons, Latins and Slavs will continue to strive, giving freely of their very best and bravest, that the world may, at last, be free. And it is for that far-off Freedom that the guns are thundering now, on the Yser, on the wild plains of Poland, on the towering heights of the Italian frontier, on the classic lands of Greece, and even in the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates, the cradle of the human race.

THE END

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